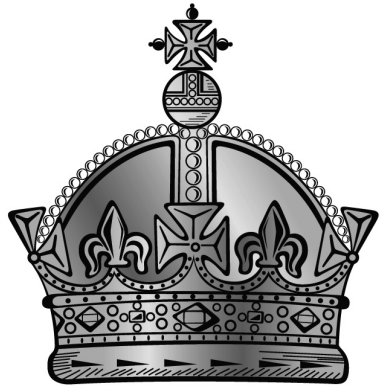
Melchizedekian Priesthood of Christ



GIL RUGH

Melchizedekian Priesthood of Christ and Its Application to the Believer
Copyright 1980, 2014
Printed November 2021

Published by Indian Hills Community Church
Systematically Teaching the Word
1000 South 84th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68510-4499

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Chapter 1

Introduction
Background of the Study

The study of the work of Christ is usually divided into three basic areas: prophet, priest and king. Boice observes,

> It has been common in Protestant circles since the Reformation to speak of the work of Christ under three general heads: prophet, priest and king.[1]

He then commented in a footnote:

> Martin Luther was probably the first to teach explicitly that Christ was a prophet, priest and king, but he never spoke of this as a "three-fold office." That distinction belongs to John Calvin who, with his greater gift for systematization, develops it fully in Book 2 of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (chapter 15). From this point, it is seen often in Protestant writings, particularly those of the English and American Puritans.[2]

Matthew 12 brings all three offices to the fore as Jesus presented His own greatness. "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here" (v. 6) a comparison focusing attention upon His position as priest. As recorded in verse 41, Jesus said, "something greater than Jonah is here," drawing attention to His office as prophet. Jesus continued, "something greater than Solomon is here," (v. 42) emphasizing His office as king.

The purpose of this study is to consider just one of these offices of Christ—that of priest. None of Christ's offices is more crucial or of greater importance to the Christian than that of priest.

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1 James Montgomery Boice, *God the Redeemer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 1978), 161.

2 Ibid., p. 261, fn. 1.

Hodge gave an excellent definition of a priest when he wrote that a priest is:

> (1) A man duly appointed to act for other men in things pertaining to God. The idea, which lies at the foundation of the office is, that men, being sinners, have not liberty of access to God. Therefore, one, either having that right in himself, or to whom it is conceded, must be appointed to draw near to God in their behalf. A priest, consequently, from the nature of his office, is a mediator.
>
> (2) A priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. His function is to reconcile men to God; to make expiation for their sins; and to present their persons, acknowledgments, and offerings to God.
>
> (3) He makes intercession for the people, not merely as one man may pray for another, but as urging the efficacy of his sacrifice and the authority of his office. His position as priest and His sacrifice are the grounds on which his prayers should be answered.[3]

Thus, when we consider the priesthood of Christ, we are studying what is basic to both the work of Christ and the walk of the Christian. As Hodge observed:

> The relation in which Christ stands to us, our duties to Him, his relation to God, and the nature of his work, are all thereby determined.[4]

The fullest discussion of the priesthood of Christ is in the Book of Hebrews.

The key chapter on this subject is in Hebrews 7, where Christ being a priest after the order of Melchizedek is developed. Christians must have a thorough understanding of this to appreciate the greatness of their salvation and to walk day by day in light of the priestly work of Christ. Therefore, this study concentrates on the priesthood of Christ and the effect of this priesthood on the believer's worship and service.

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3 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 464.

4 Ibid.

Importance of the Study

There is confusion and misunderstanding about the Christian life and how it is to be lived. The result is Christians who are frustrated and unhappy in their walk as the children of God. Obviously, this is contrary to what the Scriptures say should be the case. A life that is less fulfilling than God says it should be is not the basic problem. The root cause of this difficulty is doctrinal in nature; it is a failure to properly understand the person and work of Christ. If a person's understanding of the person or work of Christ is incorrect, then it will result in a life lived in conflict, rather than in harmony, with the Word of God.

A study of the epistles shows that a basic pattern is followed. First, there is a careful presentation of doctrinal material followed by a practical section, which shows how the doctrine is to be lived out. The reason for this pattern is that doctrine always determines duty.

No more crucial area of doctrine exists than the priesthood of Christ. Both His person and His work are involved in this central area. Only Christ is qualified to function as priest between God and man. Only Christ has done a priestly work that is sufficient to provide an eternal redemption for mankind. In a day when much of the emphasis in evangelical circles is on experience,[5] many Christians have a deficient or distorted understanding of the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ.

Without a grasp of the Bible's teaching on the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ, the believer is unable to function effectively with the confidence that God intends. A proper understanding is essential to understand the complete forgiveness received in Christ. The result of such a misunderstanding is that the believer struggles with the misconception that his daily forgiveness is the result of what he does instead of what Christ did. Tied closely is the security of the believer. Many believers

5 "Especially in these times, when there is a marked interest in the irrational depths of 'individuality' and 'personality,' we observe a great aversion to the 'official' because it supposedly threatens to turn human life into dead objectivity. Even in the early church there were fierce reactions against the overestimation of 'office' on the ground that under the influence of the Holy Spirit individual religious life is spontaneous. . . . The only way to avoid this danger is to plumb the richness of the Word of God." G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 59.

struggle with the fear that they may lose or have lost their salvation. Yet a proper understanding of the high priestly work of Christ demonstrates this to be an impossibility.

Another area basic to the life and ministry of the Christian is the priesthood of the believer. This is at the heart of both worship and service. The priesthood of Christ and what He accomplished for us is the foundation of our faith. The importance is seen when we recognize that it is our position as priest that enables us to come into the presence of God with our requests and thanks. Our function as priest enables us to present sacrifices that are pleasing to God. The believer needs to know and understand both the reality of his priesthood and the sacrifices God expects from him. A proper understanding of this area will be a determining factor in how the Christian goes about all his activities.

Therefore, believers must consider the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ. Before it is possible to talk about the conduct of the believer, there must be a proper understanding of the person and work of Christ. This knowledge will enable the believer to build his life upon that foundation. The result should be a life that is conformed to the character of Christ and, thus, is pleasing both to God and to the believer himself.

Statement of the Problem

As has already been observed, the priesthood of Christ is central both to the work of Christ and the walk of the believer. Despite the importance of the subject, many believers remain largely ignorant of it. To many Christians, the Book of Hebrews is a closed book, full of confusing Old Testament concepts. At least part of the reason for this is that much of what passes for Bible study today is superficial and trite, with much emphasis being placed upon personal experience. Christians have a tremendous need to be systematically taught the Word of God, so they have a competent grasp of its details. Paul's exhortation to Timothy is still very pertinent:

> Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Many Christians do not have the doctrinal foundation to give sta-

bility and direction to their walk as God's children. They try to skip the work of study and go on to the matter of conduct. This results in all kinds of distortions and confusion, limiting to a large extent, the personal satisfaction the Christian receives from his own relationship with the Lord. It mutes the Christian's effectiveness with others as well. Since the beginning point is to master the content of God's revelation, our first task is to consider Scripture's revelation on the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ.

It will then be essential to develop the application of this doctrinal study to the life of the believer. The goal of Bible study is never simply increased knowledge, but rather a transformed life. Paul emphasized this when he said:

> But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

Paul reminded these same people that "knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Cor. 8:1). There is always the danger of being proud of what we have learned, instead of producing the character of Christ in our lives.

Therefore, this study must consider both the doctrinal teaching on the priesthood of Christ as well as its practical ramifications in the life of the believer.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is fourfold:

1. to investigate the references to Melchizedek in the Old Testament and determine his identity and significance;
2. to examine the relationship of Christ to Melchizedek as discussed in Hebrews;
3. to consider in detail the priesthood of Christ as developed in Hebrews; and
4. to study the application of this priesthood to the believer to determine its practical import for the conduct of the Christian, particularly as it relates to forgiveness, security and priesthood.

Areas of Contribution

This study will contribute in the following areas:

1. A study of Melchizedek as presented in Genesis 14 to determine the identity of this historical figure.
2. A study of the one prophetic reference to Melchizedek to show its importance as a link between the Old Testament reference and the New Testament development.
3. A careful development of the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ as presented in Hebrews, particularly chapter 7.
4. A development of the practical implications of the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ as seen in the forgiveness, security, and priesthood of the believer.

Questions to Be Answered

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Who is Melchizedek in Genesis 14?
2. What is the significance of the prophetic reference in Psalm 110?
3. What is the significance of this priesthood as applied to Christ and developed in Hebrews?
4. What is the believer to be doing considering the priesthood of Christ?

Delimitation and Limitation of the Study

This study is subject to the following delimitations to narrow its sphere of consideration.

1. This book is written on the premise that the Bible is the verbally inspired inerrant Word of God and is thus authoritative in all matters on which it speaks. Therefore, no time is spent considering those views which come out of a deficient view of Scripture.
2. The development of the priesthood of Christ is largely confined to the consideration of Melchizedek in the Book of Hebrews, particularly chapter 7, although related passages are brought into the discussion.

3. The Levitical priesthood is considered only in its comparison with the Melchizedekian priesthood.
4. The forgiveness and security of the believer are considered only in light of the priesthood of Christ and not in the broader development of Scripture.
5. The priesthood of the believer and its attendant responsibilities are given detailed attention as a practical application of the Melchizedekian priesthood because of the central part it plays in the daily life and ministry of the believer.

Chapter 2
The Revelation of Melchizedek in History

Melchizedek appeared suddenly for the first time in Scripture:

> And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18).

The context leading up to this meeting is Abram's deliverance of Lot. Following his separation from Abram (Gen. 13:5-13), Lot moved into the well-watered valley of the Jordan and eventually settled in the city of Sodom (Gen. 13:12; 14:12). For twelve years, Sodom and four other cities of the valley were subject to Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and three allied kings. When Sodom and its allies rebelled, Chedorlaomer and his allies came and reconquered the region. The people of the conquered cities were taken captive, including Lot, who was living in Sodom. Upon receiving word of Lot's plight, Abram immediately mounted a successful rescue attempt, inflicting defeat on Chedorlaomer and his associates.

As he returned from this victory, Melchizedek appeared on the scene for a brief time in a meeting with Abram. Two verses later, this remarkable person disappeared as quickly as he had appeared. Dods comments very appropriately:

> Melchizedek is generally recognized as the most mysterious and unaccountable of historical personages; appearing here in the King's Vale no one knows whence, and disappearing no one knows whither, but coming with his hands full of substantial gifts for the wearied household of Abram, and the captive women that were with him. Of each of the patriarchs we can tell the paternity; the date of his birth, and the date of his death; but this man stands with none to claim him, he forms no part of any series of links by which the oldest and

> the present time are connected. Though possessed of the knowledge of the Most High God, his name is not found in any of those genealogies which show us how that knowledge passed from father to son. Of all the other great men whose history is recorded a careful genealogy is given; but here the writer breaks his rule, and breaks it where, had there not been substantial reason, he would most certainly have adhered to it. For here is the greatest man of the time, a man before whom Abram the father of the faithful, the honored of all nations, bowed and paid tithes; and yet he appears and passes away likest to a vision of the night.[6]

Thus, in just three verses (Gen. 14:18-20) we have the only historical appearance of Melchizedek. He is not mentioned again in Scripture until David speaks prophetically of him a thousand years later in Psalm 110:4. Another thousand years pass before he is mentioned again in the Book of Hebrews.

In this brief historical appearance of Melchizedek, there are three matters of particular importance. The first, and the one causing the greatest difficulty, is the question of his identity. The second matter has to do with the offices of priest and king as found in this one person. The last matter to be considered in this section has to do with his origin. These matters will now be the focus of our attention.

His Identity

The brevity of the account in Genesis has left many questions. Perhaps none has been the subject of more questions than that of the identity of Melchizedek. Davis observes:

> His identity has been the subject of considerable debate. There have been four basic proposals: (1) he was a theophany of the preincarnate Christ; (2) he was a historical, human person who typified Christ; (3) he was a Canaanite priest; and (4) he was Shem.[7]

Davis offers the opinion that "the fourth proposal is the least likely;

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6 Marcus Dods, *The Expositor's Bible,* ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 36.

7 John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 181.

the second is the most likely."[8] It would seem better to see three positions here rather than four since numbers two and three are not exclusive; but could both be true. These three possibilities must be carefully considered to discern which is most consistent with Scripture.

He Was Shem

This view, while mentioned by most commentators, does not seem to have any acceptance among current evangelical commentators. Bush, writing in the last century, notes that this view was common among the Jews.

> The prevalent hypothesis among the Jews has ever been that he was no other than Shem, the son of Noah, who was undoubtedly still alive in the days of Abraham. Thus the Targum of Jonathan, "But Melchizedek, he is Shem, the son of Noah, king of Jerusalem." Thus too the Jerusalem Targum, "But Melchizedek, king of Jerusalem, he is Shem, who was the great priest of the Most High."[9]

This view is evidently still held among the Jews, for Rabbi Freedman, writing more recently, notes without comment, but evidently with approval, that "The Midrash identifies him with Shem."[10] But advocates of this theory have not been limited to Jews. Hughes remarks:

> The theory that Melchizedek and Noah's eldest son Shem were one and the same person was introduced by rabbinical scholars before the end of the first century with the purpose, it would seem, of counteracting the superior importance assigned by Christians to Melchizedek as a type of Christ on the basis of the doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This intention notwithstanding, it soon gained a considerable degree of acceptance in Christian circles.[11]

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8 Ibid.

9 George Bush, *Notes on Genesis,* I (1860; rpt. Minneapolis: James & Klock Publishing Co., 1976), 233.

10 H. Freedman, "The Book of Genesis," *The Soncino Chumash,* ed. A. Cohen (London: The Soncino Press, 1947), p. 69.

11 Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 244.

Hughes goes on to mention Jerome and Martin Luther as two well-known commentators who have held to this view. Bush very thoroughly refutes this suggestion.

> But to this it is reasonably objected, (1) That no sufficient cause can be assigned why Moses, who has all along hitherto spoken of Shem under his own proper name, should here veil his identity under a different one. (2) It is inconsistent with what we know of Shem that he should be said by the Apostle in Hebrews 7:3, "without father and without mother," since his genealogy is clearly given in the Scriptures, and the line of his progenitors can be at once traced up to its fountainhead in Adam. (3) It is in the highest degree improbable that he should be a reigning king in the land of Canaan, which was in the possession of his brother's son; nor is it easy to perceive how Abraham could be said to "sojourn there as in a strange country," if his distinguished ancestor Shem were at that time a co-resident with him in the same country. (4) On this theory the priesthood of Melchizedek, i.e., of Shem, would not be of a different order from Levi's; directly contrary to the assertion of this Apostle, as recorded in Heb. 7.6, and to the whole drift of his argument. For if Melchizedek were Shem, Levi was in his loins as well as in the loins of Abraham, from which it follows, that while he paid tithes in the loins of one of his ancestors he received them in another, that is paid them to himself; which is absurd.[12]

Considering the weight of the arguments, the conclusion drawn by Bush seems justified:

> The identity of Melchizedek and Shem, therefore, cannot with any show of reason be consistently held.[13]

Some, such as J. G. Murphy, have tried to establish that Melchizedek was a Shemite chieftain living in the land of Canaan.[14] Alfred Edersheim advocated this view:

> In our view Melchizedek was probably the last representative of the race of Shem in the land of Canaan, which was now in the hands of

12 Bush, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

13 Ibid., p. 234.

14 J.G. Murphy, *The Book of Genesis* (Boston: Estes and Lavriat, 1873), pp. 290-291.

the Canaanites, who were children of Ham.[15]

However, this view is refuted by Bush's last two arguments, showing the impossibility of this person being Shem.

Thus, it seems safe to conclude that Melchizedek cannot be identified with Shem or any of Shem's descendants.

He Was A Theophany

Some interpreters believe that Melchizedek, rather than being just a man, was really a manifestation of God Himself. This is called a theophany, which is defined by Fowler as "a visible appearance of God, generally in human form."[16] He also observes:

> There is good reason to think that theophanies before the incarnation of Christ were visible manifestations of the pre-incarnate Son of God. It is to be noticed that theophanies ceased with the incarnation of our Lord.[17]

Since a theophany is a manifestation of Christ before His incarnation, it may also be called a Christophany, a visible manifestation of Christ.[18]

Those who hold to this view, therefore, believe that Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ. Henrichsen advocates this position when he states:

> We can't be dogmatic as we scrutinize the evidence, but it appears as though Melchizedek was an Old Testament revelation of Jesus Christ.[19]

A recent commentator to hold this view is Henry Morris. After pre-

15 Alfred Edersheim, *The Bible History, Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 87.

16 Arthur B. Fowler, "Theophany," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary,* ed. Merrill G. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), p. 846.

17 Ibid.

18 An excellent and thorough study of the Christophanies of the Old Testament is found in *Christ in the Old Testament* by James A. Borland (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978).

19 Walter A. Henrichsen, *After the Sacrifice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 90.

senting various ideas which have been held regarding the identity of Melchizedek, he wrote:

> The one other possibility is that Melchizedek was not only a type of Christ, but was actually Christ Himself, in one of His pre-incarnate appearances. Although this interpretation is not without its own difficulties, it does seem to harmonize most naturally with the doctrine of verbal inspiration and the principle of literal interpretation. . . . It does seem that the most Christ-honoring interpretation, the one most consistent with biblical literalism, and the one with the fewest difficulties is the recognition of Melchizedek as a glorious manifestation to Abram of God incarnate, the eternal priestly Mediator between man and God.[20]

A major problem with this view is that Melchizedek was "made like the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3). This would seem to imply that the things recorded, and not recorded, about Melchizedek were so that he would be like Christ. The word translated "made like" is the participle ἀφωμοιωμένος (*aphomoiomenos*),[21] which means "make like or similar."[22] Robertson gives the meaning as "to produce a facsimile or copy"[23] and then observes, "The likeness is in the picture drawn in Genesis, not in the man himself."[24]

Delitzsch makes the point that "ἀφωμοιωμένος signifies to make one thing in such a way like another thing, that its special characteristics are withdrawn, as it were, from itself, and transferred to the other."[25]

Westcott sees the use of the participle as significant here:

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20 Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 321.

21 ἀφωμοιωμένος is the perfect passive participle of ἀφομοιόω, which is only used here in the New Testament.

22 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 126.

23 Archibald Thomas Robertson, W*ord Pictures in the New Testament,* V (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 381.

24 Ibid.

25 Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.* I (1871; rpt. Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 334.

> The choice of the participle in place of [the noun] ὅμοιος (homois) shows that the resemblance lies in the biblical representation and not primarily in Melchizedek himself. The comparison is not between Christ and Melchizedek, but between Christ and the isolated portraiture of Melchizedek. [26]

Thus, there seems to be general agreement upon the meaning of ἀφωμοιωμένος as making one thing like another. Morris attempts to show that this argument does not rule out a theophany. He observes:

> An objection has been put forth that it would be tautological to say that Melchizedek was made "like unto the Son of God," if actually he was the Son of God. However this is quite parallel to the case in Daniel 3:25, where one was seen in the fiery furnace whose form also was "like the Son of God." [27]

This argument presents several problems. One obvious problem is that Morris has misplaced his quotation marks to read "made 'like unto the Son of God' " when it should read "made like unto the Son of God." This is significant, for as Vincent observes, ἀφωμοιωμένος means " 'made like' or 'likened,' not 'like.' " [28] Failure to properly translate this word makes Morris see a similarity between this passage and Daniel 3:25. However, the similarity is only superficial. The speaker in Daniel 3:25 is Nebuchadnezzar, the pagan king of Babylon, who has just cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into a furnace of fire, but upon looking to the furnace he sees four men instead of three. Daniel 3:25 (KJV) then reads, "He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

This verse does not say he was "made like" but only that he was like LXX—ὁμοία (*homoia*). Concerning the expression "the Son of God," Walvoord writes:

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26 Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 173.

27 Morris, op. cit., p. 321.

28 Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament,* IV (1835; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 455.

> Most contemporary scholars translate the phrase *the Son of God*, as "a son of the gods." While it is entirely possible that the fourth person in the fiery furnace was indeed the Son of God, it would be doubtful whether Nebuchadnezzar would comprehend this, unless he had prophetic insight. The Aramaic form '*elahin*' is plural and whenever used in the Aramaic section of Daniel seems to be a plural in number, as the singular is used when the true God is meant. The textual problem of Daniel 6:20 where Darius refers to the true God is decided in favor of the singular by Kittel rather than the plural. On the basis of this consistent use, the translation "a son of the gods" is preferable and in keeping with Nebuchadnezzar's comprehension at this point in his experience.[29]

Young agrees with Walvoord stating, "The translation of the Authorized Version, the 'Son of God' is not grammatically defensible."[30] The view is generally acknowledged by modern commentators and is reflected in more recent translations of the Old Testament.

The attempt, therefore, to use Daniel 3:25 as parallel to Hebrews 7:3 is without redeeming merit. The similarities are only superficial. Thus, the explanation of Hebrews 7:3 as consistent with the idea that Melchizedek was a theophany is untenable. This fact alone is sufficient to rule out the idea that Melchizedek was a theophany.[31]

Other evidences also indicate that we are not confronted by a theophany in Genesis 14. Homer Kent gives four reasons for rejecting such an identification. (Some of these will be considered later but are stated here because of their importance.) Kent's first reason is the one that has been dealt with from Hebrews 7:3, where Melchizedek is said to be "made like the Son of God." He then continues:

> (2) The statement of Psalm 110:4 calls Messiah a priest "after the or-

29 John F. Walvoord, *Daniel The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 91.

30 Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), p. 94.

31 "Such a comparison is decisive against attributing these characteristics to Melchizedek in a real sense." Davidson, quoted by Marcus Dods in *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* Vol. IV, *The Expositor's Greek Testament,* ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 308.

> der of Melchizedek." This clearly differentiates Christ and Melchizedek, and it would hardly be a clarification if the text said he was a priest after the order of himself. (3) The historical record indicates that Melchizedek was a king of a city-state in Canaan, a situation involving a fairly permanent residence on the part of the king. This would be totally without precedent so far as Old Testament revelation regarding theophanies is concerned. These were always temporary manifestations. (4) To argue from etymology that Melchizedek ("king of righteousness") was a theophany has its hazards. Historical and archaeological data indicate good reason to understand compounds with *–zedek* as reflecting a dynastic title for Jebusite kings of the area. We have the biblical example of Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, in Joshua 10:1 (whose name is even more impressive); yet it can hardly be suggested that this wicked king was a theophany.[32]

The evidence is strong and broad against the concept that Melchizedek was a theophany. Any one point would be significant evidence; but taken together, they present a conclusive case. The comment of Borland is to the point:

> In fact, the view that Melchizedek was not a Christophany is the only position that can be upheld by sound hermeneutics and exegesis applied diligently to the biblical records of Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7.[33]

He Was A Type

By far the most commonly accepted position among evangelicals is that Melchizedek was a type of Christ. This view holds that Melchizedek was a man who in certain respects prefigured Jesus Christ. Regarding his being a man, Gray offers the following observations:

> 1. The historical evidence is complete. We have the same evidence to believe that Melchizedek was a man, as that Abraham and the king of Sodom were men. By what plea is such evidence to be set

32 Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), p.127.

33 Borland, op. cit., p. 172. Borland devotes eleven pages (164-174) to a careful consideration of "Why Melchizedek Is Not a Christophany."

aside?

2. His priesthood proves his humanity. For if as the apostle says, Heb. 5:1, every high priest be taken from among men, this high priest must be a man.

3. As all the other personal types of Messiah were men, so much this personal type. And, indeed, it is altogether inconceivable, how a being, not possessed of human nature, should be a type of priest, 'in' human nature.

4. The apostle's argument requires on many accounts, that Melchizedek should be a man. For instance, if he were not a man, but the Son of God, the Holy Ghost, or an angel (for other supposition is inconceivable), why should Paul call his brethren to 'behold' and 'admire' his superiority over Abraham?

But perhaps, too much, on so very plain a subject. No reader, not far gone in criticism, ever did imagine, from the scriptural account of him, that Melchizedek was anything else than a man.[34]

Once the fact is established that Melchizedek was a man and not a theophany, there can be no doubt that he is a type of Christ. The Book of Hebrews allows for no other possibility. Mickelsen offered the following observations regarding typology:

> In typology the interpreter finds a correspondence in one or more respects between a person, event, or thing in the Old Testament and a person, event, or thing closer to or contemporaneous with a New Testament writer. It is this 'correspondence' that determines the meaning in the Old Testament narrative that is stressed by a later speaker or writer. The correspondence is present because God controls history, and this control of God over history is axiomatic with the New Testament writers. It is God who causes earlier individuals, groups, experiences, institutions, etc., to embody characteristics which later he will cause to reappear.[35]

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34 James Gray, *A Dissertation on the Coincidence Between the Priesthoods of Jesus Christ and Melchizedek* (Philadelphia: James M. Campbell, 1845), pp. 69-70.

35 A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 237.

A clear distinction between a type and an allegory must be made in this area. Edwards fails to do this and titles chapter 7 of his remarks on Hebrews, "The Allegory of Melchizedek." [36] He explained:

> We have spoken of Melchizedek's story as an allegory, not to insinuate doubt of his historical truth, but because it cannot be intended by the Apostle to have direct inferential force. It is an instance of the allegorical interpretation of Old Testament events, similar to what we constantly find in Philo, and at least once in St. Paul.[37]

In his elaboration, Edwards seems to want to make types and allegories very much the same when used in the context of Scripture. This makes for confusion rather than clarity. Ramm draws a helpful comparison between allegory and type:

> Allegorical interpretation is the interpretation of a document whereby something foreign, peculiar, or hidden is introduced into the meaning of the text giving it a proposed deeper or real meaning. . . .
>
> Typological interpretation is specifically the interpretation of the Old Testament based on the fundamental theological unity of the two Testaments whereby something in the Old shadows, prefigures, adumbrates something in the New. Hence what is interpreted in the Old is not foreign or peculiar or hidden, but rises naturally out of the text due to the relationship of the two Testaments.[38]

Thus, in Melchizedek we have a man who prefigures Christ, both in what is recorded and what is not recorded. But, as will be seen later in this study, the writer of Hebrews strictly limits himself to the biblical record of Melchizedek in Genesis and the prophetic statement in Psalms. He carefully shows how this man is a foreshadow of Christ.

This view of Melchizedek is almost universal among evangelical commentators. Borland wrote:

> It is exceedingly difficult to find any literature, current or otherwise,

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36 Thomas Charles Edwards, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Expositor's Bible, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), p. 109.*

37 Ibid., pp. 115-116.

38 Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970) p. 223.

that espouses the view that Melchizedek was a Christophanic appearance of the preincarnate Son of God.[39]

On the question of the identity of Melchizedek, Morris wrote:

The question cannot be said to be settled completely by such considerations; otherwise, the identity of Melchizedek would have been agreed on by Bible scholars long ago.[40]

However, it seems that to all intents and purposes, Bible scholars have agreed that he is a man who prefigures Christ. Morris and Henrichsen[41] were the only evangelical commentators who defended the position that Melchizedek was a theophany rather than a type. Even in the limited bibliography that Morris recommended for further study, all the authors mentioned view Melchizedek as a type.

Specific ways in which Melchizedek prefigures Christ will be examined in chapter 4, *The Realization of Melchizedek in Christ.*

His Offices

The offices which Melchizedek held are what set him apart as a strange and unique person. Candlish wrote:

The whole real mystery of Melchizedek, the commentator himself clears up. It lies, not in his person at all, but exclusively in his office. It is as a priest and prince that he is a mysterious, or rather, simply atypical, personage. And he is so, chiefly in respect of these two particulars—first, the significant appellations which he bears as king (Heb. 7:2); and secondly, the singular and isolated order of his priesthood (Heb. 7:3).[42]

King

Hebrews 7:2 says that Melchizedek "was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace." Thus, the very name Melchizedek sets him

39 Borland, op. cit., p. 164.

40 Morris, op. cit., p. 321.

41 Henrichsen, op. cit., p. 90.

42 Robert S. Candlish, *Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), p. 221.

apart as a royal person, king of righteousness. Despite this clear explanation, some have tried to establish some other meaning as the correct one.

Roberts wrote:

> "Cedhek, or Cidhik is my king." The name is explained in Hebrews 7:2 as "king of righteousness," . . . but the correct explanation is no doubt the one given above;[43]

However, the authority of Scripture must take preeminence over the speculations of men in this area as in every other. As Leupold wrote:

> In view of the explanation of 7:2 the meaning of the name is fully established: "king of righteousness." All other attempts of interpretation . . . are to be rejected.[44]

Interestingly, this name seems to have been the common title of the kings of Salem, for in Joshua 10:1, 3, we read of "Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem." The name Adoni-zedek means "Lord of righteousness." In Joshua 10, the man bearing this name is wicked in character and is the enemy of Joshua and the people of Israel.

However, Keil and Delitzsch note that,

> Even though, judging from Josh. 10:1, 3, where a much later king is called Adoni-zedek, i.e. Lord of Righteousness, this name may have been a standing title of the ancient kings of Salem, it no doubt originated with a king who ruled his people in righteousness, and was perfectly appropriate in the case of the Melchizedek mentioned here.[45]

Melchizedek is also revealed as being "king of Salem." Hebrews chapter 7 interprets this as meaning "king of peace." The context of Genesis 14 indicates that Salem also refers to a place or city. The weight of evidence is in favor of identifying Salem as Jerusalem. Psalm 76:2

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43 David Frances Roberts, "Melchizedek," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia,* ed. James Orr, VIII (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 2028.

44 H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 462-463.

45 C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament,* Vol. I (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. Be. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 208.

uses this very name for Jerusalem: "And His tabernacle is in Salem, His dwelling place also is in Zion."

On this passage, Gaebelein remarks:

> Salem is the ancient name of Jerusalem. That name is found on ancient inscriptions Ur-Salem meaning the habitation of peace. It was the residence of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and the king of peace.[46]

Waltke includes Psalm 76:2 with the reasons he gives for identifying Salem as Jerusalem.

> Salem is best identified with Jerusalem on the basis of (1) Psalm 76:2, (2) the early mention of the city in the Tell el-Amarna letters (14th century B.C.) and Assyrian inscrs., long before it became an Israelite city, as Uru-salem, Uru-salimmu, (3) the Targumim, and (4) the Genesis Apocryphon.[47]

The similarity of the names Melchizedek and Adonizek (Josh. 10:1, 3) has already been mentioned and this would be further reason for identifying Salem as Jerusalem.

Davis gives a good summary of reasons for this identification:

> By Salem, Jerusalem is probably meant; for 1) The city was in existence, bore the name of Jerusalem, and was under a king before the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. 2) The name Jerusalem means city or, to the Hebrew ear, foundation of peace or safety, so that Salem is an appropriate abbreviation. 3) Salem is used as the name of Jerusalem in Ps. 76:2. 4) The comparison of David's Lord with Melchizedek in Ps. 110:4 appears most apt if Melchizedek was king of the same city as David. 5) Jerusalem is on the route from Hobah and Damascus to Hebron, whither Abraham was going.[48]

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46 Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Psalms* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1965), p. 298.

47 B.K. Waltke, "Melchizedek," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible,* ed. Merrill C. Tenney, IV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 177.

48 J.D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 489.

All evidence clearly points to identifying Salem as Jerusalem, and thus, there does not seem to be a significant disagreement over this issue among commentators. [49] This being the case, Melchizedek is functioning as king over the very city that the One whom he prefigures will one day rule. The writer of Hebrews does not mention this fact but rather limits himself to the meaning of Salem as peace. Christ is seen as King of Peace rather than King of Jerusalem in Hebrews 7.

Priest

The most striking and important thing about Melchizedek is that he is said to be "a priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18). This position is the subject of detailed discussion in the Book of Hebrews. Some have tried to limit the impact of this priesthood by linking it to pagan worship. The Hebrew for "God Most High" is *El Elyon*, viewed by some as a Canaanite deity. For example, Speiser wrote: "He invokes an authentic Canaanite deity as a good Canaanite priest would be expected to do."[50] Von Rad, along the same line, observed:

> The report of a cult of the "highest God" (*el elyon*) has been surprisingly confirmed from extra-biblical testimony. Indeed, there is some support for the view that the cult of this *el-elyon* was practiced in ancient Canaanite Jerusalem, before Israelite times. The "highest God" was the monarchic head of a pantheon whose diversity we have only learned to know from the mythological texts found in Ras Shamra. [51]

Both Speiser and Von Rad note that their ideas do not fit well with the fact that Abraham seems to identify *El Elyon* with Yahweh in verse 22. Von Rad raises the question of a textual problem with Yahweh in verse 22 but seems to see the whole account as something of a paradox.

> Such a positive, tolerant evaluation of a Canaanite cult outside Israel is unparalleled in the Old Testament. Above all, Abraham's homage

49 In an article on Jerusalem, Horatius Bonar goes into some detail to show this identification to be correct. *Fairbairns Imperial Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* ed. Patrick Fairbairn, III (1891; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 229-230.

50 E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday Company, Inc., 1964), p. 109.

51 Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 179-180.

> to a heathen servant of the cult is quite unusual from the standpoint of the Old Testament faith in Yahweh.[52]

Speiser seems content to assume that Abraham simply joined the Canaanite name to Yahweh.[53]

Perhaps the most remarkable observation in this area is given by G. Ernest Wright. He reasons in reverse and assumes that this passage indicates that Abraham (and the other patriarchs) were not monotheists. He states:

> Abraham's worship of *El Elyon* (God Most High) in Jerusalem (Gen. 14) shows that the patriarchs were not monotheists, however, El was the head of both the Amorite and later Canaanite pantheon of deities, and we have no reason to suppose that he is anything else in the original tradition behind Gen. 14.[54]

Each of these commentators (Speiser, Von Rad, Wright) share the practice of submitting the biblical text to their authority rather than submitting themselves to the authority of Scripture. *El* was the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon. Pfeiffer wrote:

> The nominal head of the Canaanite pantheon was El, a "remote, high god," who interfered little in the affairs of the world. El may be thought of as a mild old gentleman who delegated authority to his children, only reserving the right to be final arbiter in the event of disputes among them.[55]

This does not mean that every use of *El* is a reference to a pagan deity. Pfeiffer explained:

> Just as we have one word for God or the gods, so the Hebrew, *Elohim* served a dual purpose. . . . Depending on its context, *Elohim* in the Bible may refer to the God of Israel, or the gods of the surrounding nations. Similarly *El*, or *Il* in the ancient Near East, may be a distinct

52 Ibid.

53 Speiser, op. cit., p. 109.

54 G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 32.

55 Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Patriarchal Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 62.

> personal being—the *El* of Jgaritic mythology—or simply a generic term for deity. [56]

Later he comments that Genesis 14:22 is:

> a clear instance of a fusion of two divine names which Abraham appears to have done consciously because he could identify the two names as representative of one deity.[57]

The biblical usage of God (god) is similar to our own, then, in that it is the context which determines whether the reference is to "God" or "god." It seems clear that, to the unbiased interpreter, Genesis 14 is referring to the one true God. Sarna, a Jewish writer, remarks on this and sees Abraham's use of Yahweh in verse 22 as conclusive evidence.

> As to the divine epithets used in the narrative, it is interesting to note that they are all paralleled in Canaanite religious texts. In view of this, Abraham's oath to the King of Sodom is particularly important. Unlike the case of Melchizedek, the text here has prefixed the tetragrammaton, YHWH, as though to leave no doubt as to the correct reference. We have here one more example of Israelite appropriation of ancient Near Eastern material, which is then transformed in terms of Israel's religious concepts. But this is not the whole of the story, for by giving a tithe to the priest, Abraham acknowledges that the deity of Melchizedek is indeed his own. This insertion of YHWH, therefore, can only be meant to emphasize the identity, not the difference, between the God of Melchizedek and the God of Abraham, known to the people of Israel as YHWH. This accords with the biblical idea of individual non-Hebrews who acknowledge the one God. Such a one was Jethro; another, Balaam; a third, Job. Melchizedek thus belongs to this category.[58]

Sarna's emphasis is the correct one in interpreting the pagan names in the context of Israel's religious concepts. This is the most obvious method of interpreting and the one which accepts the biblical record at face value. The account in Hebrews allows for no other method in inter-

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., p. 86.

58 Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), p. 117.

preting the account.

Not only is Melchizedek revealed in Genesis 14 as a priest of the God of Abraham, but he is also shown to be greater than Abraham. This would be inconceivable if he were not a true priest of God. The greatness of Abraham is amply established in both the Old and New Testaments, and yet Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek as a priest superior to himself. Abraham acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek in two ways.

1) **By receiving blessing from him**. Genesis 14:19 says that Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Leupold wrote:

> As one who as a priest ranks above Abram, Melchizedek bestows a blessing—for "the less is blessed of the greater" (Heb. 7:7).[59]

It might have been expected that Abraham, the one chosen by God to be a blessing, the one through whom the nations of the earth would be blessed,[60] would be the one bestowing a blessing here. But, contrary to what might be expected, he receives the blessing from Melchizedek.

Bush observed that when Melchizedek blessed Abraham:

> he performed one of the characteristic functions of a priest, whose duty was "to bless in the name of the Lord forever" (1 Chron. 23:13, Num. 6:23, 27).[61]

2) **By paying tithes to him**. Genesis 14:20 says that Abraham "gave him a tenth of all." In this act of giving, Abraham acknowledges both the validity of Melchizedek's priesthood and his superiority. Sarna has already been quoted as observing that "by giving a tithe to the priest, Abraham actually acknowledges that the deity of Melchizedek is indeed his own." [62]

Whitelaw comments to the same effect regarding Abraham giving tithes to Melchizedek:

> These, being the customary offering to the Deity, were an acknowl-

59 Leupold, op. cit., p. 465.
60 Cf. Gen. 12:2-3.
61 Bush, op. cit., p. 235.
62 Sarna, loc. cit.

edgment of the Divine priesthood of Melchizedek.[63]

The priest received tithes as God's representative; what was given to him was given to God.

> In his character of mediator, the priest received tithes. He received them as the pledge and token of the whole of what was tithed being the Lord's—of its belonging to God, and being freely dedicated and consecrated to him.[64]

Clearly then, Melchizedek was recognized by Abraham as a representative of God who is superior to himself. The tithe would later be incorporated as a mandatory part of the Law, as Lange wrote:

> As Melchizedek was a priest of the true God, the gift of the tithe of the spoil was a sanctification of the war and victory, as in the later history of Israel the tithe belonged to the priest (Lev. 27:30) and the payment of the gift of consecration, out of the law (Numb. 31:28ff.; 2 Sam. 8:11; 1 Chron. 26:27).[65]

This fact is developed by the writer to the Hebrews as significant in demonstrating the superiority of Melchizedek. The details of the significance of the blessing and the tithe will be considered more fully in the study of Hebrews 7. These actions show both the genuineness of the priesthood of Melchizedek as representing the true God and his superiority to Abraham.

Bread and Wine. The text of Genesis 14:18 states that Melchizedek "brought out bread and wine." This has raised the question among commentators as to whether there is more implied here than just physical nourishment. Some have seen a prefiguring of the eucharist instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, even though Hebrews does not mention this connection at all. Hughes, in his commentary on Hebrews, notes that this view had early support:

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63 Thomas Whitelaw, *Genesis*, Vol. I of The Pulpit Commentary, eds. H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 210.

64 Candlish, op. cit., p. 223.

65 John Peter Lange, *Genesis*, Vol. I of (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 405.

> Another opinion which is noticeably unmentioned in our epistle, but which quite certainly became firmly established as a stock interpretation, at least until the time of the Reformation, held that Melchizedek's provision of bread and wine on the occasion of his encounter with Abraham foreshadowed or anticipated the institution of the sacrament of the eucharist by Christ. It is found, for example, in Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215), Cyprian (d. 258), for whom this constituted the main significance of Melchizedek, Epiphanius (d. 403), Chrysostom (d. 407), Jerome (d. 420), Augustine (d. 430), who see in this event the first appearance of the Christian sacrament, and Theodoret (d. ca. 458), and it is commonplace in the works of the medieval commentators.[66]

This view has adherents today also. Merrill Unger seems to be following the line of Cyprian, who saw this as the most significant thing about Melchizedek, when he wrote:

> The King of Salem prefigured Christ as King-Priest since he offered the memorials of sacrifice (bread and wine) which point to the crucified and risen Christ.[67]

It seems strange that he offers this as the reason why Melchizedek prefigured Christ when it is not even one of the reasons given in Hebrews 7. The account in Hebrews 7 indicates that Melchizedek prefigures Christ without mentioning the bread and wine.

Henrichsen seems to also espouse this view although he does not directly say so. He comments:

> Paul tells us that God "announced the gospel in advance to Abraham" (Gal. 3:8). Was the bread and wine given to Abraham by Melchizedek merely for sustenance, or did it foreshadow the Last Supper in the upper room the night our Lord was betrayed?[68]

The attempt to connect the giving of bread and wine to Abraham by Melchizedek to Galatians 3:8 as though this might in some way be related to Paul's statement that God "announced the gospel in advance to

66 Hughes, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

67 Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 66.

68 Henrichsen, op. cit., p. 90.

Abraham" is a serious misrepresentation of the Scriptures. Paul explains what he means in Galatians in the same context. Galatians 3:8-9 reads:

> The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

The interpretation given within the verse to Abraham's having the gospel presented to him beforehand is that this was God's declaration to him that "all the nations shall be blessed in you," a quote from Genesis 12:3.

As tempting as it is to make an identification with the bread and wine in Genesis 14:18 and the death of Christ as memorialized in the eucharist, it seems clear that the Scriptures do not support such an identification. As Calvin wrote:

> But the Apostle, while in his Epistle to the Hebrews, he most accurately collects, and specifically prosecutes, every point of similarity between Christ and Melchizedek, says not a word concerning the bread and wine. . . . And seeing the Apostle disputes at so great length, and with such minuteness, concerning the priesthood; how gross an instance of forgetfulness would it have been, not to touch upon that memorable sacrifice, in which the whole force of the priesthood was comprehended?[69]

The silence of Hebrews on the bread and wine is fatal to giving them symbolic significance pointing to the death of Christ. Hughes agrees with Calvin.

> The worth of this interpretation must, however remain very doubtful. While there is undoubtedly, and understandably, a strong attraction in an analogy along these lines, it is difficult to believe that our author would have passed by so good an opportunity of teaching a typological lesson had it been acknowledged or approved in the apostolic church. The Genesis account, indeed, gives no indication that the provision of bread and wine by Melchizedek was in any way a

69 John Calvin, *Genesis*, Vol. I of Calvin's Commentaries (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 390.

> sacramental act. It was, rather, a generous act of hospitality intended for the refreshment of Abraham, who was fatigued after the military expedition on which he had been engaged.[70]

This view allows the action of Melchizedek to be interpreted in the most natural way as a gracious act of provision to sustain and strengthen Abraham after a strenuous battle.

> He recognizes that a generous offer of rations for the troops was at this time the prime physical necessity. Nothing more should be sought in this act of Melchizedek's. He expresses his friendship and perhaps his religious kinship with Abram by offering the most common form of meat and drink, "bread and wine."[71]

His Origin

Melchizedek's appearance on the scene in the account in Genesis is very sudden and unexpected. One might easily have drawn the conclusion from the emphasis in Genesis 12 and following that the only true worshippers of God on earth at this time were Abraham and his relatives. And then, without warning, there appears a person who not only worships the same God as Abraham but who is acknowledged as being superior to Abraham. Having established that he was truly a man, rather than a theophany, and that he was not Shem or of the line of Shem, the observation of Bush seems reasonable:

> The most probable view therefore of the true character of Melchizedek is that given by Josephus, namely, that he was a Canaanitish prince, a pious and religious man.[72]

Fairbairn agreed, and wrote:

> The view now almost universally acquiesced in is, that he was simply a Canaanite sovereign, who combined with his royal dignity as King of Salem, the office of a true priest of God.[73]

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70 Hughes, op. cit., p. 242.

71 Leupold, op. cit., pp. 463-464.

72 Bush, op. cit., p. 234.

73 Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 302.

The real question considering this is how did a Canaanite king become a priest of the true God? Where did Melchizedek get his knowledge about God that enabled him to function in a priestly capacity? Leupold wrote:

> We are compelled to regard this venerable king-priest as a worshipper and publicly an adherent of the true religion of Yahweh as handed down from the sounder tradition of the times of the Flood.[74]
>
> Though we only assume that Melchizedek came into possession of the truth concerning God by way of the tradition that still prevailed pure and true in a few instances at this late date after the Flood, there is nothing that conflicts with such an assumption except an evolution theory of history, which at this point, as so often, conflicts with the facts.[75]

Murphy basically agrees when he says that this incident forms:

> a remarkable vindication of the justice and mercy of God in having made known to all mankind the mode of acceptable approach to himself, and a singular evidence that such a revelation had been made to Noah, from whom alone it could have descended to the whole race, and consequently to this particular branch of it. We have reason to believe that this was not the sole line in which this precious tradition was still preserved in comparative purity and power. Job and his companions belong to one other known line in which the knowledge of the one God was still vital.[76]

This explanation seems reasonable and in harmony with the Scriptures. There is no reason to doubt that the truth of God communicated to and preserved by Noah would have been passed down by faithful believers even to Abraham's day. This does not necessarily imply that there would have been large numbers of believers at this time, but there is no reason to say there could not have been more.

Murphy's reference to Job is fitting since he would have been an

74 Leupold, op. cit., p. 463.
75 Ibid., p. 465.
76 Murphy, op. cit., p. 291.

approximate contemporary of Abraham and thus of Melchizedek.[77] In Job 1:5 we see Job "offering burnt offerings" on behalf of his family. Job was another person apart from the line of Abraham to whom the truth of God was communicated, and he also performed priestly functions. Of course, his priesthood is not given the same significance as Melchizedek's, but both his faith in the true God and possession of truth about Him as well as exercising priestly functions does show that God had preserved His truth down to the time of Abraham to a variety of men. The account of Job also would indicate that Melchizedek could have received his knowledge about God through direct revelation as well as by tradition. God communicated directly with Job even as He did with Abraham, and there is no reason to assume that He did not do this with Melchizedek as well.

To understand why others besides Abraham and his descendants are not given consideration in Genesis, one must appreciate its two-fold emphasis.[78] The first eleven chapters deal with "the nations," covering from the creation through the dispersion of the nations of the world. Chapters twelve through fifty deal with "the nation"—Israel. The prime purpose of these chapters is to present God's dealings with the nation of Israel from the call of Abraham, the father of the nation, to the settling of his descendants in Egypt. As Cawood wrote:

> From chapter 12 on to the end of the book it is the message of the beginning of Israel. The nation is started with one man, Abraham, and soon starts to grow with the birth of the twelve sons of Jacob. The book ends with the nation of Israel (the family of Jacob) in Egypt.[79]

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77 Ryrie offers the following evidence for dating Job in the second millennium B.C., around the time of Abraham: "(1) Job lived more than 140 years (42:16), a not uncommon lifespan during the patriarchal period; (2) the economy of Job's day, in which wealth was measured in terms of livestock (1:3), was the type that existed in this period; (3) like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Job was the priest of his family (1:5); (4) the absence of any reference to the nation Israel or the Mosaic Law suggests a pre-Mosaic date (before 1500 B.C.)." Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 747.

78 Cf. J. Vernon McGee, *Genesis*, I (Pasadena: *Through the Bible Books*, 1975), 41-43.

79 John W. Cawood, *Let's Know the BIBLE* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1971), p. 51.

Thus, individuals and events are seen in this portion of Genesis primarily considering their relationship to Abraham and his descendants. A brief reference or no reference at all (as in the case of Job) simply indicates limited, if any, contact with Abraham and his descendants. As has already been noted and will be seen further in Hebrews, the record of Melchizedek has the additional specific purpose of serving as a type.

Chapter 3
Anticipation of Melchizedek In Prophecy

The next reference to Melchizedek in Scripture after Genesis 14 is a prophetic statement in Psalm 110:4 which says, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" Psalm 110 is a short Psalm of only seven verses, and yet something of the importance of this chapter is seen in that it is referred to more often in the New Testament than any other Psalm. Kirkpatrick wrote:

> No Psalm is more frequently quoted and alluded to in the N.T. It was . . . quoted by our Lord (Matt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:42, 43); and His use of its language as recorded in Matt. 26:64 (Mk. 14:62; Lk. 22:69) clearly involved (since its Messianic significance was acknowledged) an assertion of His Messiahship in answer to the High-priest's adjuration. Verse 1 is applied by St. Peter to the exaltation of Christ in His Resurrection and Ascension (Acts 2:34, 35), and is quoted in Heb. 1:13 to illustrate the superiority of the Son to Angels. Cp. Also Mk. 16:19; Acts 5:31; 7:55, 56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:24ff.; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12, 13; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 3:21. Verse 4 serves as the basis of the argument in Heb. 5:5ff; 6:20; 7:17ff. concerning the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the Levitical priesthood.[80]

Gaebelein focuses upon one of these New Testament references to answer critics who question the Davidic authorship and Messianic import of this Psalm.

The crowning evidence that the One Hundred and Tenth Psalm is a

80 A.F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Fincastle: Scripture Truth, n. d.), p. 665.

> prophecy, and that our Lord Jesus Christ is the object of this prophecy, is our Lord Himself, He who is the infallible Son of God. In the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 22) the Pharisees and Sadducees who tempted Him received from Him a crushing answer. Then he asked them a question. "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" When they answered, "David's Son," He said unto them "How then doth David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand till I make thine enemies Thy footstool?" Here are four great facts made known by our lord. (1) The Psalm was written by David. (2) It was given to him by the Spirit of God, therefore is the inspired revelation of God. (3) It is a Psalm of prophecy concerning Himself. (4) Christ is both David's son and David's Lord, the God-man.[81]

All this points to the importance of verse 4, which as Perowne comments, "contains the great central revelation of the Psalm."[82] The emphasis in this verse is on the priesthood of Christ, but in the context of the rest of the chapter, it becomes "the first intimation of the union of the kingly and priestly functions in His person" [83] of the Messiah.

The Offices

This verse becomes the connecting link between Melchizedek in Genesis 14 and the coming Messiah. For the first time it is clearly revealed that Messiah will incorporate the offices of king and priest in one person. This was contrary to the situation that existed in Israel where it was not possible for one person to be both king and priest. The kings were to come from the tribe of Judah while the priests were drawn from the tribe of Levi. Anyone attempting to combine these two offices in one person suffered serious consequences, as the case of Uzziah clearly illustrates (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

Uzziah, king of Judah, "entered the temple of the Lord to burn in-

81 Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Psalms* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1965), p. 410.

82 J.J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (1878; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 308.

83 Ibid.

cense on the altar of incense" (2 Chron. 26:16), "which according to Ex. 30:7, 37; Num. 18:1-7; only priests were to do. Uzziah wished to exercise regal and sacerdotal functions at the same time."[84] Azariah and his fellow priests attempted to restrain him saying, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense" (2 Chron. 26:18). When Uzziah persisted, he was immediately smitten by God with leprosy (v. 19). "He fell into the same sin as Saul" (1Sam. 13:9f.).[85] Saul, too, had attempted to perform priestly duties and God punished him by rejecting him as king (1 Sam. 13:14).

These incidents show how clearly and firmly the line was drawn between the offices of priest and king. And yet Psalm 110:4 reveals that the Messiah will be both king and priest. This seeming impossibility is dealt with by his being a priest after the order of Melchizedek rather than after the order of Levi. This fact will be dealt with by the writer to the Hebrews (7:13-14) in showing the superiority of Christ.

Zechariah 6

This emphasis on Christ as both king and priest is also found in Zechariah 6:13. While Melchizedek is not mentioned by name, the uniting of the two offices in one person is clearly presented. This verse reads:

> Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.

Luck comments:

> The statement that "he shall be a priest upon his throne" definitely proves that the prophecy looks far beyond Joshua personally to Jesus. . . . The Joshua of Zechariah's day could never have been a king because he was not from the kingly line of David but rather from

84 Otto Zockler, *The Book of Chronicles*, Vol. 4, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. John Peter Lange (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 239.

85 Ibid.

> the priestly line of Aaron. Neither could Zerubbabel, who was from David's kingly line, ever have been a priest, for that office could only be held in Old Testament times by those who were from the tribe of Levi. But of the messiah it is said definitely that He will be a great King, the descendant of David, and also that He will be a priest: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa. 110:4).[86]

The clarity of Zechariah leaves no doubt that the Messiah is in view. Laetsch recognized this when he wrote:

> In Him the two highest offices in Israel shall be united, royalty and priesthood. (Cp. Ps. 110.) No longer will there be any conflict between royalty and priesthood, one opposing the other. (Cp. 1 Kings 2:22-27; 13:1ff.; 14:1-16; 16:1ff.; ch. 17ff.). In Christ both offices are united in one person and are in perfect harmony in carrying out the work for which the Son of God became man. . . . The Messianic interpretation as fulfilled in Christ is the only one doing justice to this marvelous prophecy, the only one in keeping with the words and facts. This was a promise given to the little flock of Jews to strengthen their faith in the promised Messiah, the priestly King, the royal Priest.[87]

Therefore, while Psalm 110:4 is the first clear revelation that the Messiah will be priest as well as king, this fact later received development in Zechariah 6. The emphasis in Psalm 110:4, however, is clearly on the Melchizedekian Priesthood.

The Maccabees

Some scholars have referred this Psalm to the time of the Maccabees rather than to Christ. Kirkpatrick notes:

> By some it has been supposed to refer to one of the Maccabees, who

86 G. Coleman Luck, *Zechariah* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 66.

87 Theodore Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 439. Cf. the very excellent discussion of this whole section by David Baron in *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah* (1918; rpt. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1972), pp. 190-203.

were at once priests and princes. Most plausible are the suggestions that it was addressed to Jonathan or Simon.[88]

He then proceeds to show the impossibility of such a position:

There are however at least two considerations which are fatal to the hypothesis of a Maccabaean origin for this Psalm. (a) The Maccabees were first priests and then princes. But the Psalm refers to a prince upon whom is conferred the dignity of a peculiar priesthood, distinct apparently from the hereditary priesthood of the descendants of Aaron. (b) The very terms in which Simon's election is recorded, "until there should arise a faithful prophet," testify to the fact that the Maccabaean age was sadly conscious that the voice of prophecy was silent (cp. 1 Macc. 4:46; 9:27). How then could a Maccabaean poet presume to speak, as the author of this Psalm does, in the language (v. 1) and with the authority (v. 4) of prophecy? To these considerations it may be added that it is difficult to suppose that the action of heathen princes in the appointment of Jonathan and the confirmation of Simon could be spoken of in the lofty language of this Psalm.[89]

The connection of this Psalm with Zechariah 6 also speaks against it belonging to the Maccabaean period. Delitzsch wrote:

But the priesthood, which the Maccabaeans, however, possessed originally as being priests born, is promised to the person addressed here in verse 4, and even supposing that in verse 4 the emphasis lay not on a union of the priesthood with the kingship, but of the kingship with the priesthood, then the retrospective reference to it in Zechariah forbids our removing the Psalm to a so much later period. Why should we not rather be guided in our understanding of this divine utterance, which is unique in the Old Testament, by this prophet, whose prophecy in chapter 6:12 sq. is the key to it? Zechariah removes the fulfillment of the Psalm out of the Old Testament present, with its blunt separation between the monarchial and hierarchical dignity, into the domain of the future, and refers it to Jahve's

88 Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p. 663.

89 Ibid., p. 664.

> Branch that is to come. He, who will build the true temple of God, satisfactorily unites in his one person the priestly with the kingly office. . . .Thus this Psalm was understood by the later prophecy.[90]

The clear interpretation of Psalm 110:4 given to the Book of Hebrews rules out any possibility that the Maccabaean rulers are in view. As Leupold remarks: "The best commentary on the words 'after the order of Melchizedek' is, of course, to be found in Hebrews, 5 and 7."[91]

The Priesthood

Psalm 110:4 reveals for the first time that the Messiah will not only be king, but also priest. The uniqueness of His priesthood is emphasized in this verse and developed in the Book of Hebrews. Perowne wrote:

> The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews dwells on the significance of each expression in this verse: "with an oath"—"for ever"—"after the order of Melchizedek."[92]

Alexander comments along the same line:

> The inspired commentary on this sentence, which occupies the whole seventh chapter of Hebrews, is not intended merely to explain its meaning, but also to make use of the terms, and the associations coupled with them, as a vehicle of other kindred truths.[93]

Attention must be given to this "inspired commentary," Hebrews 7. The great significance of this priesthood will be unfolded in this passage.

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90 F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, Vol. V, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 194.

91 H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 777.

92 Perowne, op. cit., p. 308.

93 Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (1873; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), pp. 459-460.

Chapter 4
The Realization of Melchizedek In Christ

The only book in the New Testament that mentions Melchizedek is the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews is also the only book in the New Testament where Jesus is specifically called a "priest." [94] The emphasis in the doctrinal section of this book [95] is on the superiority of Christ, particularly to everything associated with the Mosaic Covenant.[96] Christ is seen as superior to the Old Covenant in four major areas: Prophets (1:1-3); Angels (1:4-2:18); Moses (3:1-4:16); Aaron (5:1-10:18). The last section, covering 5:1–10:18, demonstrates Christ as superior to Aaron and the whole Levitical system and is really the heart of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The opening portion of this section, 5:1-10, presents the qualifications for a high priest and is foundational in showing that Christ is qualified as a high priest. These verses in the beginning of chapter 5 are

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94 Cf. G. D. Fee, "Priest in the New Testament," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 851.

95 This book breaks down into two major divisions, as do many of the New Testament epistles: (1) Doctrinal Exhortations, 1:1-10;18; (2) Practical Exhortations, 10:19-13:25.

96 The comparative adjective κρείττων (*kreitton*) ("superior" or "better") is a key word in this epistle, occurring no less than 13 times: 1:4, a superior name; 6:9, superior things (this occurrence, however, is of an incidental character); 7:7, a superior priest; 7:18, a superior hope; 7:22, a superior covenant; 8:6, a superior covenant and superior promises; 9:23, a superior sacrifice; 10:34, a superior possession; 11:16, a superior country; 11:35, a superior resurrection; 11:40, a superior privilege; 12:24, a superior blood-shedding. To these may be added 9:11, a superior sanctuary, where the Greek, instead of κρείττων reads μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς. (P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 50, fn. 1.

followed by a parenthetical warning passage covering 5:11–6:20. The discussion of the priesthood is resumed in 7:1 with the development of the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ. Before looking into the detailed development of Melchizedek, it will be necessary to look briefly into the qualifications for the priesthood and how Christ qualifies.

The Qualifications of the High Priest

The author begins his development of the priesthood by reminding his readers of the qualifications for the high priest in Heb. 5:1-10. This section is divided into two parts, with verses 1-4 presenting the qualifications for the Levitical priest and verses 5-10 showing that Christ is qualified. Five basic qualifications are presented, although, because of similarities, there is some overlap. No attempt will be made to go into detail in this section since Heb. 7 will present a more careful consideration of crucial matters. The basic point to be made is that Christ meets the qualifications laid down for the high priest.

1. **He is chosen from among men**. The first verse of Heb. 5 states that "every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God." The first matter of importance, therefore, is that the priests were chosen from among men. This seems too obvious to deserve mentioning, but it begins to clarify matters for a comparison he wants to make: (a) It would rule out beings such as angels from functioning as priests. As great as angels are, they cannot function as priests for men because they are not chosen from among men. They are not human beings. (b) When he comes to a consideration of the priesthood of Christ, it will be important to note that Christ was a man. The priest had to be a human being and Jesus Christ was a man, as well as God.

Exodus 28 records the setting aside of Aaron and his sons to the priestly ministry. In Ex. 28:1, Moses is instructed by God to "bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me." Aaron and his sons were chosen "from among the sons of Israel." Moses was obviously aware that Aaron and his sons came from among the sons of Israel, but it is repeated here to lay stress on the fact that Aaron, as high priest, is chosen

from among those that he will represent, the children of Israel.

Heb. 5:7 begins "In the days of His flesh," emphasizing the time when He was among mankind as a man. "He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death." This continues the emphasis that Christ was truly a man and was associated with man in his weaknesses and sufferings. This in no way detracts from His deity, but only shows that He was truly man as well as truly God. The reference seems to be to the agony in Gethsemane immediately prior to the crucifixion (Matt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-42; Lk. 22:39-46). He died but was then raised from the dead three days later because "He was heard because of His piety."

So, as man, Jesus experienced intense suffering and agony, but He also "learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). As God, He didn't need to learn anything; but as man, He learned obedience, even to the point of death. Philippians 2:8 expresses the same idea: "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Hebrews 2:10 and 12:2-3 presents the same truth regarding the humanity of Christ.

Hebrews 5:7-8 reveals that Christ was a man and thus meets the qualification of being taken from among men.

2. **He represents men before God**. The second important qualification for a high priest is that he is "appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God." The priest is to be man's representative to God, in contrast to a prophet who was God's spokesman to man. A word which is a synonym for the high priest in this representative capacity is "mediator." Hebrews 8:3 says, "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices," and then verse 6 continues, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant." The "more excellent ministry" is His ministry as High Priest. This point is very closely associated with the one which follows.

3. **He offers sacrifices for sins**. The way in which the high priest represents men to God is by offering "both gifts and sacrifices" (Heb. 5:1). The prime responsibility of the high priest is to offer sacrifices for sins so that those he represents might be reconciled to God.

Leviticus 16 presents a very clear picture of the high priest performing his ministry of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. On this one day of the year, the high priest was allowed to enter the holy of holies to the mercy seat in the presence of God and offer sacrifice for the sins of the nation Israel. In Lev. 16:15, the instruction for the high priest is that:

> he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil . . . and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

The significance of this act is given in the next verse:

> He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins (Lev. 16:16).

The stress is clearly upon the high priest offering a sacrifice for the people so that they might be forgiven and be reconciled to God.

The ministry of the high priest continues in Leviticus 16 with the high priest continuing his activity of representing the people in atonement for their sin. Another key part of this is contained in verse 21 when the high priest is to lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions regarding all their sins.

The purpose of all the activity on this special day is given in verse 30:

> for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD.

The fact that Christ offered a sacrifice for sins is alluded to in Hebrews 5:9: "He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." For Christ to be "the source of eternal salvation," he must have offered a sacrifice sufficient to take care of sins forever. This, of course, is a key point of the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews 10 stresses the fact and sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ:

> By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (v. 10);
>
> but he, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time (v. 12);

> For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (v. 14).

Christ has not only offered a sacrifice for sins, but He has offered a sacrifice that is greater than all other sacrifices.

4. **He is identified with the people**. This qualification is very similar to the first one, but here it is given greater elaboration. The high priest is said to be able to "deal gently . . . since he himself also is beset with weakness" (Heb. 5:2). The fact that the high priest experiences the same weaknesses as the people he represents keeps him from having a harsh or unsympathetic attitude toward them.

For the Levitical priest, this is evidenced in the fact that "he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself" (Heb. 5:3). This reference goes back to the Day of Atonement:

> Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself (Lev. 16:11).

Before the high priest could offer sacrifice for the people, he had to offer sacrifice for his own sins, thus showing that he was beset by the same weaknesses.

Christ also identified with us in our weaknesses:

> For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18)

He can "deal gently" with us because He, too, has experienced temptation. The same thought is presented in Hebrews 4:15:

> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

This statement adds an important difference between Christ and other priests. He was "without sin." While identified with the people He represents in their weaknesses, He has never succumbed to sin.

The qualification given in Hebrews 5:2 must be noted to avoid misunderstanding: "he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided."

The ones dealt with "gently" are those who go astray in ignorance. Those who apostatized or rebelled against God and His commandments had no provision made for their forgiveness. Numbers 15:27-31 draws a clear distinction between these two kinds of people. Concerning the person who sins unintentionally:

> The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven (Num. 15:28).

In contrast, verses 30-31 deal with the willful rebel:

> But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is a native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be on him.

This removes any idea that willful rebels will be dealt with gently or with moderation. Passages like Hebrews 10:26-31 and 12:18-29 reflect the unmerciful punishment of those who despise the Word of God.

5. He is chosen by God. The last qualification given in Hebrews 5 for the high priest is found in verse 4:

> And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

Exodus 28:1 records God's appointment of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. Those who ignored this fact and attempted to place themselves into the priesthood suffered dire consequences (cf. Korah, Num. 16; Saul, 1 Sam. 13:5-14; Uzziah, 2 Chron 26:16-23).

Hebrews 5:5-6 make clear that Christ did not take it upon Himself to become a high priest, but He was appointed to that position by God. The quote in verse 5 is from Psalm 2:7 and is used as an evidence that God has validated Christ as His Son. (The reference seems to be to the resurrection of Christ. Cf. Acts 13:29-34; Rom. 1:4). The quote of Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 7:17 is a clear statement that God appointed Christ to the office of High Priest.

These five qualifications show Christ to be a high priest according

to the pattern of Scripture. However, His priesthood is of a different line than that of Old Testament priests for He is said to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 presents a careful development of the Melchizedekian Priesthood and its superiority to the Levitical system. Attention must now be focused on this central chapter to see the superiority of Melchizedek as realized in Jesus Christ.

The Superiority of the Melchizedekian Priesthood

Hebrews 7 begins by reiterating the account from Genesis 14, showing Melchizedek to be a type of Christ. These matters have been considered earlier in this study.[97] The stress in the first three verses is "For this Melchizedek . . . remains a priest perpetually," with the rest of these verses modifying this basic idea. In developing and applying this historical situation through the remainder of chapter 7, two areas of the superiority of this person and his priesthood are considered:

1. Superior to Abraham and Levi (7:4-10)
2. Superior to Levitical Priesthood (7:11-28)

Superior to Abraham and Levi

Having seen that Melchizedek was "made like the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3), and that therefore Christ's priesthood is like that of Melchizedek:

> The next stage of the argument is to establish the greatness of Melchizedek and thus demonstrate the superiority of his priesthood. The argument is fourfold.[98]

1. **Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham**. The greatness of Abraham was clearly recognized by every Jew. He is identified here as "the patriarch" (ὁ πατριάρχης) (v. 4) which "is thrown to the end of the sentence for emphasis."[99] The fact that Abraham, the father of the

97 See pp. 17–20 of this book.

98 Neil R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 139.

99 James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, The International Critical Commentary*, ed. Alfred Plummer (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), p. 94.

Jewish nation, gave a tithe to Melchizedek is an indication of the greatness of Melchizedek. The Law gave the descendants of Levi the right to collect tithes from the people of Israel. Vine observes:

> Whilst the whole tribe of Levi had a right to tithes (Num. 18:28-30; Deut. 14:22, 27-29), the writer does not mention this, as he is concerned only with the priests, the most honored part of the tribe of Levi.[100]

Kent comments on the authority and supremacy involved in the Levites collecting tithes:

> The right to tithe someone involves a certain authority and thus a superiority. In the case of the Levitical priests, their authority stemmed from the Mosaic law. It could be considered only as an official supremacy for this specific purpose, and not some inherent superiority, for actually they were brothers. The Levitical priests and the remaining Israelites from whom they extracted tithes were equally descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israelites paid tithes to Levitical priests only because the Mosaic Law commanded it, not because their officials had an inherent right to tithe them.[101]

In stark contrast the author notes, "But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham" (v. 6). No law required Abraham to pay tithes to Melchizedek since Melchizedek was not of the line of Levi.

Delitzsch comments that the Levites collected tithes "in virtue of full inherent personal priestly power." [102] By voluntarily paying tithes, Abraham was recognizing the greatness and superiority of the priest that he was confronting. Thus, the author began this section with the exhortation, "Now observe how great this man was." That one so great as Abraham would recognize him as superior certainly sets him apart as

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100 W. E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1952), p. 67.

101 Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 128.

102 Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, I (1871; rpt. Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 343.

a "great" (πηλίκος) person.[103] The readers are commanded to observe or consider (θεωρεῖτε) this fact.[104]

The word "consider" is *theoreo* in the Greek text. This word is used, not of an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at a thing with interest and attention. *Theoreo* would be used of a general officially reviewing or inspecting an army, as against *theaomai* which would be used of a lay spectator viewing the parade. It speaks of a critical, discriminating inspection.[105]

2. **Melchizedek blessed Abraham**. Hebrews 7:6 says that Melchizedek not only collected a tenth from Abraham but he also "blessed the one who had the promises." Regarding the tenses used in this verse, Lenski comments: "Note that 'he has tithed and has blessed' are perfect tenses because of the lasting significance and effect of these priestly acts."[106] Westcott concurs, remarking: "The fact is regarded as permanent in its abiding consequences. It stands written in Scripture as having a present force."[107]

The writer of Hebrews continues to stress the importance of Abraham by referring to him as "the one who had the promises."

The point which the writer here brings out is that, although Abra-

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103 "This word 'great'—to how few of the human race has God ever applied it! To Abraham (Gen. 12:2): 'And I will bless thee and make thy name great; to David (2 Sam. 7:9): 'I will make thee a great name.' The Shunamite was called 'a great woman' (2 Kings 4:3); and the angel of the Lord said of John the Baptist, 'He shall be great in the sight of the Lord' (Lu. 1:15). Other than these, I find none except Melchizedek called 'great' by God." William R. Newell, *Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1947), p. 221, fn. πηλίκος is only used here and in Galatians 6:11 in the New Testament.

104 "The structure of the whole passage shows that the verb is an imperative and not an indicative," Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 175.

105 Kenneth S. Wuest, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), p. 128.

106 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 217.

107 Westcott, op. cit., p. 177. He comments further: "The use of the perfect in the Epistle is worthy of careful study. In every case its full force can be felt." He then lists each use of the perfect in Hebrews. Cf. also p. 43 of this book.

> ham had the promises, and was therefore himself a fountain of blessing to mankind and the person on whom all succeeding generations depended for blessing, yet Melchizedek blessed him.[108]

The point is then made, "But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater" (v. 7). To appreciate the force of this argument and to avoid confusion, it is important to recognize that the word "bless" is used in a variety of ways in the Scriptures. One author has noted five distinct uses:

1. God blesses nature (Gen. 1:22) and mankind (Gen. 1:28).
2. Godly men should "bless" God; i.e., they should adore him, worship him, and praise him (Ps. 103:1, 2).
3. Godly men by words and actions can bestow blessings on their fellows (Matt. 5:44; 1 Pet. 3:9).
4. In Bible times, godly men under inspiration bestowed prophetic blessings on their progeny, e.g., Noah blessing Japheth and Shem (Gen. 9:26, 27) and Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27:27-29, 33).
5. We can bless things when we set them apart for sacred use, e.g., the "communion cup" (1 Cor. 10:16).[109]

Kent focuses on the idea of the word "bless" in Hebrews 7:7, commenting:

> It must be understood that this "blessing" is something different from simply "praising" (as, for example, James 3:9, where men bless God, but are certainly not superior to Him). This blessing is an official pronouncement, coming from one properly authorized, which actually bestows something upon its recipient. . . . When he blessed Abraham, his words were not just congratulatory, but were an expression of God's approval. Thus at that moment Melchizedek stood between God and Abraham and was "the better," while Abraham

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108 Marcus Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. IV, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 310.

109 "Bless, Blessing," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), p. 127.

was "the lesser."[110]

Numbers 6:24-27 indicates that the giving of a blessing was the function of the priests who stood as God's representatives. There Aaron and his sons are told to bless the sons of Israel with the promise given by God, "I then will bless them" (v. 27). Thus, as a priest, Melchizedek both receives tithes and bestows a blessing. That the one who bestows the blessing is greater than the one who receives it is "without any dispute." No controversy or disagreement can be justified on this point.

3. **Melchizedek is immortal**. Hebrews 7:8 presents a contrast between the mortality of the Levitical priests and the immortality of Melchizedek. The author speaks of the Levitical priests as "mortal men." The word translated "mortal" is ἀποθνήσκοντες. The present active participle of ajpoqnhv/skw, could accurately be translated "dying." The fact is that the Levitical priests who are receiving[111] tithes are "dying men." These men are destined to die and even now are in the process of moving toward that end. This was true of Aaron (Num. 20:28-29; Duet. 10:6) and each of his descendants down to the author's day. Vincent comments that "The emphasis is on ἀποθνήσκοντες 'dying.' The Levites are dying men, who pass away in due course, and are succeeded by others." [112]

This stands in sharp contrast to Melchizedek who received tithes from Abraham; but, instead of dying, "It is witnessed that he lives on." [113] Wuest notes this contrast:

> The emphasis is upon the fact that dying men receive tithes. The Levites are dying men who pass off the scene in due time and are succeeded by others. The record concerning Melchizedek does not mention his death. Thus the record testifies in that way to the fact

110 Kent, op. cit., p. 129.

111 λαμβάνονσιν is the present active indicative of λαμβάνω. The present tense here may indicate that it was written prior to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and so the priestly service of collecting tithes continues.

112 Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, IV (1887); rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 458.

113 μαρτνρονμένοσ is the present passive participle of μαρτνρεω. ζη is the present active indicative of ζαω. "It continues to be testified that he continues to live."

that he is still alive. [114]

The fact that Melchizedek continues to live reiterates what was said in Hebrews 7:3:

> Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.

The record in Genesis 14 testifies to his continual life. This record is contained in what is not said rather than in what is said. Westcott observes:

> The writer referring to the exact form of the record in Genesis, on which he has dwelt before (v. 3), emphasizes the fact that Melchizedek appears there simply in the power of life. So far he does not die; the witness of Scripture is to his living. What he does is in virtue of what he is.[115]

Delitzsch agreed with this interpretation:

> The actual historical Melchizedek no doubt died, but the Melchizedek of the sacred narrative does nothing but live—fixed, as it were, in unchangeable existence by the pencil of inspiration and so made the type of the Eternal Priest; the Son of God. The sacred writer has here still only Gen. 14 in view: the abrupt and absolute way in which Melchizedek is there introduced is for him a Scripture testimony *that he liveth*.[116]

Not all commentators agree that the testimony in view in verse 8 is a reference to Genesis 14 as has been presented by Delitzsch. Lenski observes that "commentators are divided as to where this testimony is to be found: some think of Gen. 14, some prefer Ps.110, while others appeal to both."[117] Alford feels strongly that Genesis 14 is not in view here.

> The testimony meant is certainly that of Scripture, probably, that in Ps. 110:4, where an eternal priesthood, and therefore duration, is predicated of Melchizedek. . . . It cannot well be . . . the more nega-

114 Wuest, op. cit., pp. 130-131.
115 Westcott, op. cit., p. 178.
116 Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 346.
117 Lenski, op. cit., p. 219.

> tive fact of his death not being recorded, which would not amount to a testimony that he lives; and it is improbable that in so express a word as μαρτυρούμενος the writer should . . . intend to combine both the positive testimony and the inference from the omission. [118]

This position, however, causes Alford to despair of understanding what the author of Hebrews is saying in 7:3.

> It is one of those things in which we must not be wise above what is written, but must take simply and trustingly the plain sense of our Bibles on a deep and mysterious subject, and leave it for the day when all shall be clear, to give us full revelation on the matter.[119]

Alford's confusion in this area comes from attempting to make more of the type, and what is said about the type, than Scripture does. Mickelsen offers an important reminder in this area:

> From the Old Testament we know nothing as to how Isaiah died or what caused the death of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah. But nothing is made of this from the typological standpoint. But in Melchizedek's case the omission is made use of by the writer of Hebrews. Therefore, the typical character of Melchizedek is controlled by a twofold selection: (1) The picture of his life as given in the Old Testament; (2) The underlining of certain details which bring the correspondence into clear focus.[120]

Thus, in the line of reasoning followed by the author in Hebrews 7, it seems consistent to see Genesis 14 as the background for the statement in verse 8 that Melchizedek lives. However, it should be noted that the

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118 Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament,* IV (n.d.; rpt. Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 134.

119 Ibid.

120 A. Berkeley Mickelsen, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963, p. 250. Vincent fails to appreciate this point and comments from his liberal orientation: "It is, of course, evident to the most superficial reader that such exposition of O.T. Scripture is entirely artificial, and that it amounts to nothing as proof of the writer's position. Melchizedek is not shown to be an eternal high priest because his death-record is lost; nor to be properly likened unto the Son of God because there is no notice of his birth and parentage." (Vincent, op. cit., p. 456.)

author will soon use Psalm 110:4 in stressing the endless duration of Melchizedek and his priesthood (cf. Heb. 7:16-17). This will be further developed, with its implications in verses 23-25. The emphasis of verse 8 is, therefore, that Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priests because he is immortal while they are mortal.

4. **Melchizedek received tithes from Levi**. Hebrews 7:9-10 presents the fourth evidence of Melchizedek's superiority. It is toward this proof that the other three have been moving, and it adds greatly to their significance. Up until now, a Jew could say, "Very well, Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, but Abraham was not a priest. If Abraham had been a priest, as Levi's descendants were, then Melchizedek would not have been superior." The author responds to such an argument by saying that, in effect, Levi also paid tithes to Melchizedek.

> And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him (Heb. 7:9-10).

This argument is introduced by the expression "so to speak" (ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν) which Alford says is "used when any thing is about to be said that is unexpected, or somewhat strained, not likely to be universally recognized, at least in the general way it is asserted."[121] The phrase means "so to speak, one might also say"[122] or "almost, practically."[123] Westcott adds:

> This classical phrase does not occur elsewhere in the N.T. or in LXX., but is found in Philo. . . . It serves to introduce a statement which may startle a reader, and which requires to be guarded from misinterpretation.[124]

The point is that since Abraham is the great-grandfather of Levi

121 Alford, op. cit., p. 134.

122 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 305.

123 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 676.

124 Westcott, op. cit., p. 178. Cf. also the extensive remarks by Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 348, fn. 2.

(Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-Levi), Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes, acknowledging the superiority of Melchizedek. Thus, it could be said that Levi, too, paid tithes on that occasion.

> The tendency in Jewish theology was to view heredity in this realistic manner. Levi was in the loins of Abraham in that he was descended from him. When Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi paid him tithes. Thus, Melchizedek was superior to Levi. . . . This kind of reasoning would appeal to Jewish readers, for they emphasized strongly the solidarity of the Jewish race. The whole Jewish law, its ordinances and priesthood, it regarded as potentially in Abraham.[125]

This line of reasoning, while somewhat different, is not limited to this portion of the New Testament. Paul argues the same way in Romans 5:12 when he shows that when Adam sinned, all humanity (his descendants) sinned and so all became affected by death even as Adam. Paul makes this point again in 1 Corinthians 15:22 when he says "in Adam all die." This principle is seen beyond the Scriptures also as Kent observes:

> This principle is seen in many life situations. A man's citizenship bestows certain privileges as well as obligations upon his descendants, even though they may not have personally chosen that citizenship themselves. What a man does with his property affects his heirs, whether for good or bad. Jews and Christians generally have little difficulty in seeing that the blessings God spoke to Abraham are shared by his family. Likewise, the author expects his readers to understand that other implications of Abraham's action devolve also upon his descendants.[126]

When the author of Hebrews says that Levi "paid tithes" (7:9), he uses the word δεδεκάτωται, which is the perfect passive indicative of δεκατόω. An accurate translation of this passive verb would be "was tithed" rather than "paid tithes."[127] The significance of this is noted by Westcott:

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125 Wuest, op. cit., p. 131.

126 Kent, op. cit., p. 131.

127 "The passive voice is used when the subject of the verb is spoken of a suffering or being acted upon." H. P. V. Nunn, *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek* (1912; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 62.

> It must be observed that Levi is not represented as sharing in the act (δεκάτην ἔδκεν) but in the consequences of the act passively (δεδεκάτωται). . . . The act of his father determined his relation to Melchizedek, just as if Abraham had made himself Melchizedek's vassal.[128]

Also note that this verb is in the perfect tense. The indication that Levi "was tithed" has implications for the present, not just the past.[129] A permanence is attached to this act, as Hughes observed:

> The permanent import of what took place on the occasion of Abraham's (and, in accordance with the argument, Levi's) meeting with Melchizedek is brought out in the Greek by the sequence of finite verbs in the perfect tense: Melchizedek "has received tithes" (δεδεκάτωκεν) from Abraham and "has blessed" (εὐλόγηκεν) him (v. 6); and Levi, who receives tithes, "has paid tithes" (δεδεκάτωται) through Abraham (v. 9). These perfects, says Spicq, have "the force of the present" and "perhaps indicate that the consequences of these events are permanent."[130]

Thus, the summary of Hughes on this argument is very much to the point:

> Both seminally and by representation Levi was present in the person of his great-grandfather on this occasion. It may be affirmed, therefore, that Levi who receives tithes—this is something characteristic of the Levitical status—actually paid tithes through Abraham. In

128 Westcott, op. cit., p. 178.

129 "The use of the perfect indicative in Greek denotes that the action of the verb is regarded as complete at the time of speaking, and that its results are regarded as still existing [author's emphasis]. "When it is said that the action is regarded as 'complete' this does not mean it is regarded as ended; but only that it is regarded as brought to its appropriate conclusion in such a way that its effects remain in action. The perfect has therefore really as much to do with present as with past time, since it describes the present result of a past action." Nunn, op. cit., p. 70. "The perfect is not used in Greek unless stress is on the fact that the action denoted by the verb has been brought to its appropriate conclusion, and that its results remain." Ibid., p. 72.

130 Hughes, op. cit., pp. 253-254, fn. 11.

> this historic encounter, then, what was established was not simply a precedent but a whole relationship, the significance of which is permanent: namely, that the order of Melchizedek, fulfilled in Christ, is superior to the order of Levi, which with the advent of Christ is surpassed and superseded.[131]

This argument concludes the fourfold proof of the superiority of the Melchizedekian Priesthood.

Superior to the Levitical Priesthood

The writer of Hebrews' purpose in considering Melchizedek is to demonstrate the overwhelming superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood to the Levitical priesthood. In demonstrating this superiority, the author shows that the Levitical system has been completely replaced and has no continuing purpose. Lightfoot observes:

> Since Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek, two results follow: (1) the old Levitical priesthood, with its attendant Mosaic legislation, has been put aside; and (2) a new and better hope has been introduced, through which men draw near to God. . . . Indeed, the latter point, that through Christ men really have access to God, is the central idea of the Epistle. Everywhere, sometimes between the lines and sometimes stated boldly, this thought is present: only the religion of Christ brings men to God.[132]

In establishing the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood in Hebrews 7:11-28, Psalm 110:4 is given careful attention, being quoted in Hebrews 7:17, 21. Perowne makes the following observations concerning the elaboration of Psalm 110:4 in this section of Hebrews:

> (1) He lays stress on the fact that this solemn inauguration into the priestly office was by an oath, which was not the case with the institution of the Levitical priest. This, he observes, is a proof that Christ is Mediator of a better covenant than that of Moses (Heb. 7:20-22).
>
> (2) He argues that as the priesthood rests on an unchangeable 'foun-

131 Ibid.

132 Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 141.

dation,' so it is in its 'nature' unchangeable: a priest 'forever' (7:24, 28).

(3) He enlarges upon all these points in which Melchizedek rather than Aaron, was the most fitting type of Christ.[133]

Hebrews 7:11-28 presents four areas in which the Melchizedekian priesthood is seen to be superior to the Levitical priesthood. The heart of the matter, of course, is that Jesus Christ, the One who is high priest after the order of Melchizedek, is the only high priest now acceptable to God. These evidences of His superiority show that He alone accomplished what the Levitical system could never do.

1. **Superior to the provision of perfection**. This section covers verses 11-19 and shows that even the Old Testament, which these Jews were clinging to, looked to the new and greater priesthood, which would accomplish what the old one could not.

Beginning the discussion on this point, the writer of Hebrews makes an important point. Referring to the Levitical priesthood, he says "for on the basis of it the people received the Law." This is just the opposite of what would be expected. The Old Testament would seem to give the idea that the Levitical priesthood was given based on the Mosaic Law. But here we are told that the Law was given based on the Levitical priesthood. The point being made is that the purpose for the Mosaic Law was to give credence to the Levitical priesthood. If the priesthood is removed from the Law, what is left? Nothing of real value! The purpose of the religious system is to enable a person to be forgiven and be brought into a right relationship with God, to enable that person to worship God in an acceptable manner. As has already been seen, the Levitical priests functioned as the people's representatives in providing a way for them to be acceptable to God. It could be said that the Mosaic Law was given on the basis of the Levitical priesthood because the priesthood is foundational to everything else. The Levitical priesthood is the heart of the system, and apart from it everything else would be relatively meaningless.

The writer of Hebrews begins by noting that if the Levitical priest-

133 J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (1878; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 308.

hood could have accomplished perfection, there would have been no need to talk of a coming priest after the order of Melchizedek. He puts it in the form of a question in Hebrews 7:11:

> Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

Concerning the word "perfection" (τελείωσις / τελειοσισ) Delitzsch comments:

> τελείωσις, moral and religious perfection (or perfecting), is the establishment of complete, unclouded, and enduring communion with God, and the full realization of a state of peace with Him, which, founded on a true and ever-valid remission of sins, has for its consummation eternal glory; in one word, it is complete blessedness. [134]

The remarks of Kent are to the same effect:

> Perfection (teleiosis) is used in the sense of completeness. In this context, it refers to the making of men acceptable to God, which was the function of the priesthood. Something may be termed perfect or complete when it fulfills the purpose for which it was designed. Priesthood is designed to establish relations between God and sinful men.[135]

The very fact that God spoke of a coming priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek indicates that the Levitical priesthood was not accomplishing its intended goal of reconciling man with God. Something more or something else needed to be done. This would necessitate a new and different priesthood.

The fact that this priesthood would be different in kind is indicated by the word used for "another" (ἕτερον / *heteron*) in verse 11. This word means "another of a different kind" in contrast to (ἄλλος) which means "another of the same kind." Vincent comments on (ἕτερον) in

134 Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 350.

135 Kent, op. cit., p. 132.

verse 11: "Not merely another, but a different kind of priest."[136]

Wuest notes the same emphasis:

> The word "another" is the translation of *heteros*, meaning, "of another kind." That is, since the Levitical priesthood brought nothing to completion, not merely another priest was needed, but another priest of a different kind. It could not be another priest in the line of Aaron, but one of a different order of priesthood. [137]

Verses 12-14 indicate that a change of priesthood also necessitates a change of law. Since the purpose of the Law was to validate and give authority to the Levitical priesthood, it follows that a change in priesthood will necessitate a change in law also. The Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law are inseparable. The Law establishes a priesthood for those who are descendants of Levi through Aaron. No one else is qualified. Verse 14 notes:

> For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

No provision in the Law was made for a priest out of the tribe of Judah. Thus, if there is to be a priest out of the tribe of Judah, the Law will have to be changed.

The argument is continued in verses 15-16 with the observation that the need to replace the Mosaic Law:

> is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

The requirements set down in the Mosaic Law for the Levitical priesthood were all related to the physical.

> In the Levitical system, matters of physical ancestry, marriages, health, diet, and ceremonial performance were prominent. A man's spiritual fitness was not a vital consideration as a priestly qualification. Examples of wicked priests in the Old Testament (Annas, Caia-

136 Vincent, op. cit., p. 459.

137 Wuest, op. cit., p. 132.

phas, Ananias) amply confirm this fact.[138]

In contrast to the Levitical priesthood, which is based on a law relating only to physical matters is "another" (ἕτερος / *heteros*, cf. v. 11) priest who is "according to the likeness of Melchizedek." The word "likeness" (ὁμοιότητα / *homoioteta*)[139] points back to the comparison made in the first three verses of chapter 7. This is the priest who holds his priesthood, not on the basis of a physical law, "but according to the power of an indestructible life." He has a life that cannot be destroyed or dissolved; in other words, His priesthood is eternal. This fact is supported in verse 17 by quoting Psalm 110:4. No law is needed to set down the requirements for a succession of priests because this priest will never be succeeded. There are no physical guidelines or requirements for Him to meet.

The contents of the previous paragraph are drawn together in verses 18 and 19. The prophecy of Psalm 110:4, quoted in verse 17, indicates God's plan is to set aside the Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood. When He says, "there is a setting aside of a former commandment," he uses the word ἀθέτησις (*athetesis*), which Hughes observes as very fitting in this context.

> The noun ἀθέτησις, which occurs in the New Testament only in our epistle, here and in 9:26, is shown by the papyri to have been familiar in legal usage, often in conjunction with ἀκύρωσις (*akurosis*), in the sense of annulment or cancellation. . . . It is an appropriate term, accordingly, to describe the annulment of a legal enactment.[140]

The reason given for setting aside the Law is "because of its weakness and uselessness." This is a strong statement, especially when it is remembered that the Law was given approximately 100 years earlier by God Himself to Moses (cf. Ex. 19ff.). The interpretation given by the

138 Kent, op. cit., p. 135.

139 The only other use of this word in Hebrews is in 4:15. "The cognate expressions ἀφωμοιωμένος (*aphomoiomenos*) in verse 3 and κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιωμένος (*kata ten homoiomenos*) here in verse 15 should be noticed." Hughes, op. cit., p. 263, fn. 29.

140 Ibid., p. 264, fn. 30.

author in Heb. 7:19 is "for the Law made nothing perfect." The Law is "weak and useless" from the standpoint of providing perfection. The need is for man to be made acceptable to God. This necessitates that He be perfect, everything God said he should be, and the Law accomplished this for no one. God demanded, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11: 45) and the Law could not enable man to do this.

Several other passages of Scripture shed light on what it means when it says the Law was weak. Romans 8:2 refers to the Law as "the law of sin and death" and goes on to explain, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did" (Rom. 8:3). The Law was weak "through the flesh." The Law had nothing wrong with it. In fact, the Law was perfect and was an accurate revelation of the character of God. The problem was that the Law demanded perfection from sinful human beings. It gave commands to be obeyed, but it provided no power to carry them out. The weakness of the Law was that sinful human beings could not keep its righteous demands. And so, it was useless because, while it demanded perfection, it did not produce perfection in its subjects.

The question might be raised as to the purpose of the Law in the first place if it was not able to provide perfection. Paul answers this question in 1 Timothy 1:8-9:

> But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane.

The Law was given to demonstrate how sinful sinners really are (cf. Rom. 7:9-13). God never intended the Law to be a way of salvation, but rather to prepare man for salvation in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:19, 22).

It might seem from all this that there was no provision for the salvation of those who lived under the Law. Hebrews 9:15, however, indicates that Old Testament saints were saved by Christ, just as New Testament saints. This verse reveals that "a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant." The "first covenant" is a reference to the Mosaic Law, and "the death" is a reference to the death of Christ. God could forgive those who believed

in Him in the Old Testament because Christ was going to die to pay the penalty for their sins.

Hebrews 7:19 gives the other side to complete the picture. The setting aside of the Law is balanced by the "bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." The Law is superseded and replaced by a "better hope" which is a reference to Christ, who has accomplished for us what the Law could never do.

> "Hope" is used metonymically, that is to say, for the object itself, for the thing hoped for. From the giving of the first promise in Gen. 3:15, renewed in Gen. 12:3 and 17:8, the coming of Christ unto this world was the great thing which believers longed for. Abraham rejoiced to see His day (John 8:56), as did the prophets search diligently concerning it (1 Peter 1:11, 12). Hence, we read of Simeon "waiting for the Consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25) and of aged Anna speaking of the newly born Saviour to "all them that look for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38). In like manner, the "blessed hope" set before God's saints throughout this dispensation is the "appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).[141]

This "better hope" is that "through which we draw near to God." The Law, rather than drawing people "near to God," reminded them that because of sin they must be separated from Him. "Under the Law, the people could not enter where the high priest entered once in the year, they could not draw near to God. To do so meant death."[142] Even the giving of the Law to Moses was accompanied with the warning to the people that they were to keep away upon penalty of death (cf. Ex. 19:12, 21, 24). The presence of the veil in the tabernacle, and later the temple, was to keep the presence of the Lord closed to all except the high priest on the Day of Atonement (cf. Heb. 9:2-8). The statement of the Law was clear: "Keep away for you are sinful." The death of Christ has removed all barriers and provided access for men into the very presence of God. This was pictured when the "veil of the temple was torn in two from top

141 Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, I (1954; rot, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 399.

142 Vine, op. cit., p. 72.

to bottom" (Matt. 27:51) at the death of Christ. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil" (Heb. 6:19; cf. also 10:19-22).

Calvin offers an admonition which shows the significance of the statement of Hebrews 7:19, not only to the original readers, but to those today as well.

> Then he who still holds to the shadows of the Law, or seeks to restore them, not only obscures the glory of Christ, but also deprives us of an immense benefit; for he puts God at a great distance from us, to approach whom there is liberty granted to us by the Gospel. And whosoever continues in the Law, knowingly and willingly deprives himself of the privilege of approaching nigh to God.[143]

Thus, the writer of Hebrews has shown that the Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it provided perfection for the worshipper while the Levitical priesthood did not. The Law, which was foundational to the Levitical system, was shown to be weak and of no value in bringing men into the presence of God. It has, therefore, been set aside in favor of the priesthood of Melchizedek which does bring perfection.

2. **Superior in the institution with an oath**. An additional evidence of the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek is that it was confirmed by an oath from God. In contrast, an oath was never given in connection with the Levitical priests. Again, Psalm 110:4 is cited as proof. Concerning this matter of the oath, Milligan comments:

> An oath stamps that to which it is applied with the element of eternity. And the very fact that the Levitical priesthood was appointed without an oath was in itself a proof of its provisional and temporary character. . . . The Word of God . . . needed nothing to make it sure; but in His great good-will to man, and that He might leave him no excuse for thinking that the covenant might not be fulfilled, He gave in One, whose eternal Priesthood was confirmed to Him with an oath, an assurance that all the blessings promised in the covenant

143 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. 22 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 173.

> would be bestowed. With such a Priest it was impossible any longer to associate the idea of change. [144]

The author of Hebrews has referred to the matter of God's oath earlier in his epistle when talking about the promise to Abraham. Hebrews 6:13 states, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself." He then gives the explanation for the oath in verses 16 and 17:

> For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath.

This makes clear that God gives an oath, not because His word alone is not reliable, but because an oath indicates permanence and finality. An oath shows the "unchangeableness of His purpose."

The force of the oath in Psalm 110:4 and quoted in Hebrews 7:21 is emphasized by the addition of "and will not change His mind." Calvin comments on this statement in his remarks on Psalm 110:4:

> The addition, "and will not repent," is intended to indicate the absolute character of the oath, that it cannot be annulled or suspended in consequence of any altered circumstances; that no change of counsel, or of conduct in the parties concerned shall cause any change in the divine purpose, so that it may be said, Jehovah repented, as he is said to have repented of creating man on observing the wickedness of the human race (Gen. 6:6). A similar form of expression is elsewhere employed to express the immutability of what God declares or swears (Numb. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29.) [145]

As has already been demonstrated in the preceding section, the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law were inseparable. Therefore, with the institution of a new priesthood, a new covenant is necessary as well. This fact is presented in Hebrews 7:22 when it is said, "so much the

144 George Milligan, *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1899; rpt. Minneapolis: James Family Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 123-124.

145 John Calvin, *Commentary of the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 6 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 304, fn. 1.

more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." Chapter 8 gives a careful study of this covenant and its contrast with the old covenant. Up to this point, the Mosaic Law has not been referred to as a covenant,[146] but the comparison made in 7:22 with the "better covenant" as well as the development in 8:6ff makes his point clear.

Christ is said to be "the guarantee" (ἔγγυος / *enguos*) of this new and better covenant. It points to the fact that the fulfillment and realization of this covenant is secured by Jesus Christ. Concerning the word and its significance here, Bruce observes:

> In common Greek it is found frequently in legal and other documents in the sense of a surety or guarantor. The ἔγγυος (*enguos*) undertakes a weightier responsibility than the μεσίτης (*mesites*) or mediator (cf. Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24); he is answerable for the fulfillment of the obligation which he guarantees. . . . The old covenant had a mediator (cf. Gal. 3:19) but no surety; there was no one to guarantee the fulfillment of the people's undertaking: "All that Jehovah hath spoken we will do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). But Jesus guarantees the perpetual fulfillment of the covenant which He mediates. [147]

The one that God appointed to the office of priest with an oath is the one who guarantees the fulfillment of the accompanying covenant. Therefore, both covenant and priesthood are seen to be secure and irrevocable. The presence of the oath is an important evidence of the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood.

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146 "διαθήκη occurs here for the first time in the Epistle. As will be more fully explained in . . . chapters 8 and 9, the word means dispensation, covenant, and testament. The Levitical priesthood is connected with the law, the *old* covenant, temporary and imperfect, with a *worldly* sanctuary; the Melchizedek priesthood of our Lord with the *new*, eternal, and perfect covenant, of which Jesus is Mediator and Surety (compare 8:5; 9:15), and with the *heavenly* sanctuary." Adolph Saphir, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, I (1932; rpt. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1946), 351.

147 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 150, fn. 70. διαθήκη is only found here in the New Testament.

3. **Superior in its eternal duration**. Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever," indicates that Christ would be an eternal priest. The permanent priesthood of Christ is now contrasted in Hebrews 7:23-25 with the Levitical priests who were obviously subject to death. The limited time of service of the Levitical priests is made clear in verse 23: "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing." Every high priest eventually died. Josephus devotes two columns to naming over 80 men who had been high priest between Aaron and the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. [148] This fact is an obvious weakness when contrasted with the one who, "because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently" (v. 24).

Under the Levitical system, there could be only one high priest at a time and only death brought that ministry to a close. If Aaron had never died, he would never have been succeeded in the office of high priest. Since Christ "abides forever" He holds His priesthood forever. The fact that Christ died on the cross does not negate the argument here, obviously. His death on the cross was a once-forever priestly act of sacrifice. He has conquered death and will never die again. "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him" (Rom. 6:9). Having offered the one sacrifice necessary to take care of sins, He forever serves as high priest.

The endless life of Christ has already been alluded to in Hebrews 7:8, 16. When the author of Hebrews says that Christ holds his priesthood "permanently," he uses the word ἀπαράβατον (*aparabaton*). Concerning this passage and the significance of ἀπαράβατον, Barclay comments:

> None of the old order of priests lasted forever. But the priesthood of Jesus is for ever and ever. Now the thing that matters in this passage is the overtones and the implications of the almost untranslatable words the writer to the Hebrews uses. He says that the priesthood of Jesus is a priesthood that will never pass away. The word that he uses is the word *aparabatos*. *Aparabatos* is a legal word. It means

148 Flavios Josephus, *Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1963), p. 425.

> inviolable. A judge lays down that his decision must remain *aparabatos*. It must remain unalterable. It means non-transferable. It describes something which belongs to one person and cannot ever be transferred to anyone else.[149]

Moffatt agrees with this meaning of ἀπαράβατον, saying it is "a legal adjective for 'inviolable' " and that it is "here used in the uncommon sense of non-transferable."[150] Some commentators disagree with this definition. Lenski believes that "this word always has the sense of 'unchangeable' . . . and does not mean, as some suppose, 'untransferable.'"[151] Hewitt seems to agree with Lenski and cites Moulton and Milligan in support:

> This rare word is not found elsewhere in the Greek Bible. Many have translated it 'without a successor,' 'not transferable;' but such a meaning is not found anywhere else. Moulton and Milligan point out that the technical use compared with the later literary meaning constitutes a very strong case against the rendering 'not transferable.' [152]

The argument about the word is somewhat academic for the context clearly indicates that there is only one priest after the order of Melchizedek, and so the thought of a transfer of the priesthood is out of the question, whether ἀπαράβατον carries the idea or not. The comment of Hughes may present the best balance:

> In our view, the appropriateness of the term is enhanced by its ambivalence: the priesthood of Christ does not pass to another precisely because it is a perpetual priesthood.[153]

The author of Hebrews has already made the point in Heb. 7:11-19

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149 William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 87.

150 Moffatt, op. cit., p. 99.

151 Lenski, op. cit., p. 238.

152 Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 124-125, Cf. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (1930; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 53.

153 Hughes, op. cit., p. 269, fn. 34.

that Melchizedek provides perfection or completeness for worshippers while the Levitical system could not. In verse 25 he makes the point that this perfection is permanent. The fact that Christ holds His priesthood forever means that the provision of His priesthood, salvation, is forever also. The verse begins with the word "hence" (ὅθεν / hothen) which "is a favorite expression of the writer's and states a summary deduction as the result of this unchangeable priesthood of Jesus."[154]

The word "forever" is the translation of a phrase εἰς τὸ παντελὲς (*eis to panteles*) which can mean both "forever" and "completely." This word is used only one other time in the New Testament, Luke 13:11, where the meaning is "completely." There seems to be no necessity to decide between the two meanings in Hebrews 7:25 since both are true and both fit the context. He is able to save forever and completely. Hughes agrees:

> The expression εἰς τὸ παντελὲς is at the same time a resumption and an amplification of the εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (*eis ton aiona*) of Psalm 110:4. Like the term ἀπαράβατος (*aparabatos*) . . . it is enriched by its ambivalence, combining the notions of perpetuity on the one hand—thus "for all time" (RSV) . . . —and of completeness on the other—thus "absolutely" (NEB), "fully and completely" (Phillips).[155]

In contrast to the Levitical system which is characterized by "weakness and uselessness" (Heb. 7:18) and having "made nothing perfect," Christ saves completely and forever.

> The Levitical priests could not so save: no τελείωσις (*teleosis*) was achieved by them; but everything for which the priesthood existed, everything which is comprised in the great (2:3) and eternal (v. 9) salvation, the deliverance (2:15) and glory (2:10) which belong to it, are achieved by Christ.[156]

Those whom "He is able to save forever" are those "who draw near

154 Lenski, op. cit., p. 238.

155 Hughes, op. cit., p. 269, fn. 35.

156 Dods. op. cit., p. 316.

to God through Him." This priesthood is limited in its scope just as the Levitical priesthood was limited. Only those who avail themselves of the high priest and his ministry, benefit from its provisions. This is a clear warning to the Hebrews who were contemplating a return to Judaism. This glorious salvation would be experienced only by those who approached God through Christ. This is a main thrust of this epistle: that only those who come through God's appointed High Priest, Jesus Christ, have access into God's presence. No other priesthood, including the Levitical, can make such a provision.

Christ saves as He does because "He always lives to make intercession." He represents us continually in the presence of God. Not, as the Levitical priest did once a year on the Day of Atonement, or until death prevented him from continuing.

On the word "intercession" (ἐντυγχάνειν) Lightfoot remarks:

> The verb "intercede" (*entunchano*) has a variety of meanings. It can mean "to light upon," "to fill in with," or "meet with" 'to converse with," "talk to," "appeal to," "petition" or "pray." "Intercede" is used of lightning that strikes someone, of "meeting with" books and thus "reading" them, of visiting someone for a special purpose. It is commonly used in the papyri for "making a petition;" for example, seeing that "night and day I pray to God for you." The term is infrequent in the New Testament and means "to appeal to" (Acts 25:24), "to plead against" (Rom. 11:2), or "to plead for" (Rom. 8:27, 34). In Romans (8:34), as well as in Hebrews, Christ is represented as interceding for His own. This He did while on earth (cf., Lk. 22:32; Jn. 17:6-26); and this He continues to do (*entunchanien*, present infinitive) in heaven (cf. 1 John 2:1). Even in the heavenly state He lives not for Himself but for others. As priest He stands at the mid-point between God and man, representing strengthless believers at the throne.[157]

The author of Hebrews has now shown that the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it is eternal in duration.

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157 Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 147.

4. **Superior in the perfection of its priest**. Hebrews 7 closes (vv. 26-28) with an emphasis on the personal superiority of Jesus Christ to the Levitical priests. This section begins with the statement, "for it was fitting that we should have such a high priest." "Fitting" is the translation of ἔπρεπεν (eprepen)[158] which means "be fitting, be seemly or suitable."[159]

> After the incompleteness of the Levitical system, it was appropriate that the messianic high priest be complete in His person and work, so as to bring salvation to its proper culmination. This our great high priest was (and is) fully able to do because in His own person He possesses in the absolute sense what the former priests reflected only to a limited degree and in some cases merely in a ceremonial way.[160]

A brief description is given of the person of this high priest beginning with the word "holy." The word here is not the common word ἅγιος (*hagios*) but the word ὅσιος (*hosios*)[161] which emphasizes a personal holiness which is part of the character of the individual. Revelation 15:4, in speaking of God, says "You alone are holy" [ὅσιος]. God alone has absolute personal holiness. Christ has this holiness as the Son of God. Human beings can have holiness only through faith in the person and work of their high priest, Jesus Christ.

The second characteristic of Christ is that He is "innocent" (ἄκακος / *akakos*). This is a word that means "blameless" or free from everything that is evil or harmful. Dods observes:

> Here the word seems to point to that entire absence of evil thought and slightest taint of malice which might prompt disregard of human need. [162]

Christ is then said to be "undefiled" (ἀμίαντος / *amiantos*).

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158 ἔπρεπεν is the imperfect active indicative of πρέπω.

159 Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 706.

160 Kent, op. cit., p. 142.

161 ὅσιος is used in the following New Testament passages: Acts 2:27; 13:34, 34; 1 Timothy 2:8; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 7:26; Rev. 15:4; 16:5. Westcott has a helpful extended comparison of ἅγιος and ὅσιος. Westcott, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

162 Dods, op. cit., p. 318.

> The language may be intended to suggest a contrast between the deep ethical purity of Jesus and the ritual purity of the Levitical high priest, who had to take extreme precautions against outward defilement (cp. Lv. 21:10-15).[163]

Regarding these three words, Lenski remarks:

> We take them to be synonymous, all three, each in its way, emphasizing the one supreme quality of sinlessness; "without sin" (Heb. 4:15); all three are the more weighty because the writer has already stated how Jesus was tempted and tried by suffering and death (2:9, 10, 18; 4:15; 5:7-9) without even the least fault appearing in him.[164]

The words "holy, innocent, undefiled" are now summarized in the phrase "separated from sinners." Hebrews 2:9-18 emphasized that Christ was identified with mankind, "made like His brethren in all things" (2:17). But, even though He was identified with humanity, He did not become a sinner. Some have connected this phrase with what follows and so believe that He was "separated from sinners" when he was "exalted above the heavens." Bengel says, "He was separated when he left the world."[165] Alford holds the same view, commenting more at length:

> This lets us into the true meaning, which is, not that Christ, ever and throughout, was free from sin . . . however true that may be, but (cf. next clause) that in His service as our High Priest, He, as the Levitical high priests in their service (Lev. 21:10ff.), is void of all contact and commerce with sinners, removed far away in His glorified state and body, into God's holy place.[166]

This view, however, does not do justice to the emphasis of this passage, which is on the perfection of Christ. The fact that He is wholly untainted by sin is the point being made and which will be further emphasized in Heb. 7:27. Hughes remarks on the weakness of making "separate from sinners" refer to Christ's presence in heaven.

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163 Moffatt, op. cit., p. 101.

164 Lenski, op. cit., p. 243.

165 John Albert Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies*, 2 (1864; rpt. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 629.

166 Alford, op. cit., p. 144.

> The concept of Christ as now being remote from sinners in this quasi-physical sense, is however, inappropriate to the immediate context and indeed to the thought of the epistle as a whole, which emphasizes nearness rather than remoteness—the nearness of Christ to mankind through his incarnation (2:10ff.) and nearness of the sinner, through Christ, to the throne of God's grace (4:14ff.; 10:19ff.). The separateness of Christ from sinners of which our author speaks here points rather to his separation from that which constitutes them sinners, namely their sin. . . .
>
> The point, then, is that Christ, who is "holy, blameless, unstained," is ipso facto "separated from sinners."[167]

The fact that Christ is "exalted from the heavens" reveals again the greatness of His person. He is above the atmospheric heavens and the stellar heavens, now in the third heaven which is the very presence of God (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). The author of Hebrews has already mentioned that Christ was a high priest "who has passed through the heavens" (Heb. 4:14). Ephesians 4:10 says that Christ is the One "who ascended far above all the heavens." Hebrews 9:11, 23-24 emphasizes that Christ now serves in the presence of God. He has entered "into heaven itself" (9:24).

Hebrews 7:27 emphasizes not only the sinlessness of Christ, but also the greatness of His sacrifice. As has already been noted, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest first offered sacrifice for his own sins (Lev. 16:11). The point of Christ's sinlessness has already been made in Heb. 7:26, so, obviously, He has no need to offer a sacrifice for His own sins. He has none! But the point is, no recurring sacrifice for sins for the people is offered either. Christ's one sacrifice takes care of sins forever. No repeated sacrifices are necessary "because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." His sacrifice of Himself was sufficient to take care of all sins for all time (cf. Heb. 10:10, 12, 14).

The fact that the high priest is said to offer up sacrifices "daily" has caused some question. The activity of the Day of Atonement as recorded in Leviticus 16 seems to be the background for this verse. However, this

167 Hughes, op. cit., p. 274.

was done once a year, not daily. That reference probably has a broader context, especially considering Hebrews 10:11 which refers to the fact "every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices." So, the reference could be not only to the Day of Atonement but to the whole sacrificial system carried on under the high priest's ministry. Hughes refers to the fact that some evidence indicates that in New Testament times the high priest did offer a daily sacrifice.[168]

Whatever the explanation of the detail, the point of the author is clear: The Levitical system demanded continual, repeated offerings for sin, while Christ offered one sacrifice of such value that it will never be repeated.

Christ Himself is shown here to be the sacrifice that was flawless or without defect. The Levitical sacrifices looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice, Christ, who would be without sin, flawless in every way (cf. Lev. 22:19-25). First Peter 1:19 says we were redeemed "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." So, Christ is not only our perfect high priest, He is also our perfect sacrifice.

The last verse of Hebrews 7 summarizes the matter of the personal superiority of Jesus Christ as high priest. "For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak." These priests were shown to be weak "because they were prevented by death from continuing" (Heb. 7:23). They were also shown to be weak because the Levitical high priest had to offer up sacrifice first for his own sins. The Levitical priests were sinful men destined to die.

In contrast, "the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever." Some four hundred years after the giving of the Law, God announced with an oath that the Messiah would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). This one is said to be "a Son." In contrast to the "men," plural, only one is appointed with an oath and He is a Son. "Absence of the article with huion stresses the quality of "Son-ness" possessed by Christ. Thus, in His very essence relative to God, He is far superior to any other priest."[169]

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168 Ibid., p. 277.

169 Kent, op.. cit., p. 145.

> The term Son is, indeed, of central significance in our epistle. Thus God who formerly spoke by the prophets has now, and finally, spoken in the person of his Son through whom the world was created (Heb. 1:1f.); the ministering angels are not to be compared with him to whom God has said, "Thou art my Son" and who, as the appointed heir of all things, shares in the glory of the Father's sovereignty (1:5, 8, 13); faithful Moses ministered in God's household as a servant, but Christ was faithful over God's household as a Son (Heb. 3:5f.); yet, although his status was that of Son, he obediently suffered and overcame, with the result that he has become the source of eternal salvation to all who trust in him (5:8-10); and so also here, it is not sinful and mortal men who are appointed by the word of the oath but One who in his own right is the eternal Son and who by his self-offering has procured everlasting reconciliation for us.[170]

Christ is said to be "a Son made perfect forever." The word translated "made perfect" is τετελειωμένον,[171] concerning which Robertson remarks:

> The process (Heb. 2:10) was now complete. Imperfect and sinful as we are we demand a permanent high priest who is sinless and perfectly equipped by divine appointment and human experience (2:17f.; 5:1-10) to meet our needs, and with the perfect offering of himself as sacrifice.[172]

Thus, it has been clearly shown that the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood in the perfection of its priest.

These four areas taken together offer overwhelming evidence of the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood to the Levitical priesthood. Having seen something of the fact and importance of the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ, it now becomes important to direct attention to a consideration of how this subject affects the life and walk of the believer.

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170 Hughes, op. cit., p. 280.

171 τετελειωμένον is the perfect passive participle of τελειόω.

172 Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 5 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 387.

Chapter 5
Application of Melchizedek to the Believer

All the truth of Scripture is intended to have an impact on the way the child of God lives his life. Paul wrote to Timothy:

> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

God's Word is sufficient to make the child of God everything God desires and enables him to be and to equip him to do everything God wants him to do.

God intends that the Christian's life be based on His revealed Word. The foundation, therefore, for a consistent Christian life is a correct understanding of the Word of God. Many Christians are unhappy or confused in their Christian life because they have a meager or incorrect understanding of the Scriptures. The beginning point is to know what God has said.

However, an adequate doctrinal foundation is not the total picture. A person can have much knowledge about Bible doctrine and still manifest very little of the character of Christ in his life. Paul told the Corinthians that "knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Cor. 8:1). God's intention is that the Christian's life not only be based on the Scriptures, but that it be conformed to the Scriptures as well. It is of utmost importance that the child of God acts upon the knowledge of the Word that he has received. James gives the exhortation to "prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). As the believer responds to the Word which he has heard, the Spirit

works in his life to conform him to the image of Christ who is the One being revealed in the Word (2 Cor. 3:18). This sequence pattern is why the common order of the New Testament epistles is to begin with a presentation of doctrinal truth and to conclude with an application of that doctrine to the life and conduct of the believer.

The Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ has significant and important implications for the way a Christian lives his life. Having considered the doctrinal foundation presented in Scripture regarding Melchizedek, now the believer must apply this doctrine to his daily life. Many areas of application could be considered, such as the daily cleansing of the believer or the believer's security. However, for the purposes of this study, attention will be focused only on the area of the priesthood of the believer.

No area of broader significance exists for the believer's life than that of his priesthood. Every area of his life is influenced by the fact that he is a priest before God. This priesthood is a direct result of the work of Jesus Christ as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The Reality of the Believer's Priesthood

The fact of the priesthood of the believer is generally accepted among evangelical commentators today; however, there are some who question the validity of identifying every Christian as a priest. Fee rejects the idea of a general priesthood of believers today, concluding his arguments by writing:

> In the language of the NT itself there would seem to be little [evidence] to support [the idea/existence of] . . . a general priesthood of believers. Rather, the whole Church has been brought to God through the high priestly ministry of Christ; and the "royal priesthood" of the Church is the high privilege of mediating Christ to the world.[173]

To come to such a conclusion, Fee had to ignore the clear testimony of several Scripture passages that point to the fact that every believer is

173 Gordon D. Fee, "Priest in the New Testament," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 852.

a priest and is responsible to function accordingly. Part of his problem may be a failure to deal with Scripture in a literal way. The comments of Walvoord seem to be much more consistent with the teaching of Scripture:

> As an important corollary of Christ in His office and work as Priest, the priesthood of individual believers is revealed in Scripture. Frequent mention is found in the Bible of the believer's work as a priest under Christ the High Priest (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Other passages may be added to these basic texts which relate to exhortations to pray and similar doctrines. The priesthood of the believer is one of the important areas of spiritual life presented in the Bible and one of the great truths reclaimed in the Protestant Reformation.[174]

Several specific passages of Scripture point clearly to the believer's priesthood. In each case, the priesthood of the believer is clearly based upon the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 4:14-16

In this passage, the author gives an exhortation to the believer based upon the work of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. Christ is the One who has offered a sufficient sacrifice for sins (Heb. 2:17) and who now serves in the presence of God as our representative. The author exhorts that "Since we have a great high priest . . . Jesus the Son of God . . . therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" (4:14a, 16). Just as the work of the Old Testament high priest made it possible for the Levitical priests to come before God on behalf of the people, so our High Priest has made it possible for us to come before God on behalf of ourselves as well as others. This point will be discussed later in this section in connection with the ministry of intercession. This passage makes it clear that the high priestly work of Christ makes it possible for believers to come before God as priests.

1 Peter 2:5, 9

Twice in 1 Peter 2, Peter refers to believers as a priesthood. In verse

174 John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 248.

5 he comments: "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." In verse 9 he states: "But you are . . . a royal priesthood." Some question what Peter was referring to when he mentioned this priesthood. Johnstone gave two possibilities:

> Like "priesthood" in English, ἱᾰράτευρα (*hierateura*) is used either of office or in a collective sense; and in the present passage either of these would suit the connection,—(1) "for holy priestly position and function," explained by the infinitive clause following, which in this case would be a clause of apposition; or (2) "for (εἰς το εἶναι / *eis to einai*) a body of holy priests," in which case ἀνενέγκαι (*anenenkai*) is an infinitive of purpose. The unquestionably collective use of ἱᾰράτενμα (*hieratenma*) in verse 9 strongly favors giving the word this sense,—which in itself, moreover, seems somewhat the more natural.[175]

The distinction does not affect the point being made regarding the priesthood of believers unless one attempts to see the corporate idea as ruling out an emphasis in the individual priesthood of believers.[176] Robertson's observation seems accurate when, after noting the two possibilities in emphasis, he comments: "At any rate, Peter has the same idea of Rev. 1:6 (*hiereis*, priests) that all believers are priests (Heb. 4:16) and can approach God directly."[177]

Also, it would be difficult to have a reference made to the church as a body being a priesthood and not indicate at the same time that the members of this body are priests. The context of chapters 1 and 2 of First Peter indicate that there is a stress on the individual as well as the corporate body.

Peter makes it clear that the priesthood of these believers is based upon the high priestly ministry of Christ. In 1 Peter 1, he has shown that salvation is "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and

175 Robert Johnstone, *The First Epistle of Peter* (1888; rpt. Minneapolis: James Family Publishing Co., 1978), p. 122.

176 Cf. Fee, op. cit.

177 Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 96.

spotless, the blood of Christ" (1:19). In chapter 2 he makes the point that "being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood" (v. 5) is a result of "coming to Him" (v. 4), referring to Christ. Again, in verses 6-8, Peter focuses on the importance of the work of Christ saying, "This precious value, then, is for you who believe" (v. 7). He then goes on to say, "you are . . . a royal priesthood" (v. 9).

Thus, Peter shows that believers are priests before God as a result of the work of Christ. He clarifies this further when he says that as a holy priesthood, believers are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). The matter of the believer's sacrifices will be discussed later in this study.

Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6

The apostle John speaks of the priesthood of the believer in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation. He, too, very carefully bases this priesthood on the high priestly work of Jesus Christ. In the last part of Revelation 1:5, John wrote: "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood." The love of Christ and the work of redemption are joined here as elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Rom. 5:8). The work of redemption is viewed as accomplished by the blood of Christ. Ladd writes concerning this:

> The Greek idiom in turn reflects a Hebrew idiom, so that we might well translate, "he has freed us from our sins at the price of his blood." Elsewhere John wrote: "by thy blood thou didst redeem men to God" (Rev. 5:9). In the Bible, blood is a metaphor drawn from the slaughter of the sacrificial lamb to represent sacrificial death, particularly at the Passover, when God freed Israel from bondage to Egypt. The sacrifice of Christ on his cross was the cost of loosing men from bondage to their sins.[178]

The contrast in tenses in Revelation 1:5 is also significant.[179] It shows the love to be continuing while the work of redemption has been ac-

178 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 27.

179 ἀγαπῶντι (*agaponti*) is the present active participle of ἀγαπάω (*agapao*). λυσάντι (*lusanti*) is the aorist active participle of λύω (*luo*).

complished.

John goes on to say that this one who has accomplished redemption for us by His high priestly sacrifice "has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:6). Christ our High Priest "has made us"[180] priests to God. The priesthood of the believer is a direct result of the work of Christ as High Priest. Believers are said to be made two things in this passage: a kingdom and priests. Regarding believers being identified as a kingdom, Ladd comments:

> The question here is whether the church is called a kingdom because it is a people under a king, or because it fulfills a kingly function. This appears to be settled in Rev. 5:10. Christ has made men "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth" (see Rev. 20:6; 22:5). God's people are a kingdom not merely because they are the people over whom God reigns, but because they are to participate in the messianic reign of Christ. [181]

The priestly ministry of the believer has a future, as well as a present, significance. Revelation 20:6 notes that all those who share in the "first resurrection" will be priests in the Millennium: "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection . . . they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." The "first resurrection" is a quality of resurrection and includes all saints from all time.[182] All these are destined to be priests and to rule with Christ during His earthly reign.

Revelation 5:9-10 is parallel to 1:4-5 in emphasis. The scene in chapter 5 takes place in heaven after the rapture of the Church. The twenty-four elders, who represent the Church,[183] are seen to join in a song, saying in 5:9-10:

> Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe

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180 ἐποίησεν (*epoiesen*) is the aorist active indicative of ποιέω (*poieo*).

181 Ladd, op. cit.

182 Cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 298-299.

183 Ibid., pp. 105-107.

and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.

The order in these verses is the same as in chapter 1. First, the high priestly work of Christ is presented as accomplishing redemption by the sacrifice of Himself (v. 9). It then follows that He has made those whom He redeemed to be priests to God.

The reality of the priesthood of the believer is amply attested to by various passages of Scripture. The believer's priesthood role is founded on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Everyone who has experienced redemption by faith in Him and His completed work is made a priest. At this point believers must understand that every believer is a priest to God. The distinction is between believers who are priests and non-believers who are not priests.

The priesthood is also reflected in the responsibilities carried out by the believer. As is true in every case, what you are determines what you do. The Christian must recognize who he is in Christ so he will know what he is to do. As would be expected if believers are priests to God, certain priestly functions are expected of them. A key responsibility of priests is the offering of sacrifices. The New Testament reveals that, as priests, believers are responsible to be offering sacrifices to God.

The Sacrifices of the Believer's Priesthood

A key element in the Levitical system was the sacrifices that were to be offered by the Levitical priests. The first seven chapters of Leviticus are devoted to the various sacrifices which the priests were to offer. The importance of these matters is seen in Leviticus 10 when Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, are destroyed by God for not following God's commandments in this area.

Believers today have sacrifices to offer also, but of a different kind. Jesus Christ our High Priest has dealt with the issue of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. His sacrifice has settled forever the question of sin. No other sacrifice can be offered in connection with the forgiveness of sins. The sacrifices of the believer have to do with obedience and submission to the will of God. Certain facts about these sacrifices will show their place and function in the Christian's life.

Their Character

Peter identified the sacrifices of the believer as "spiritual sacrifices" (I Pet. 2:5). Lenski saw the prime emphasis here as a contrast with the animal sacrifices of the Levitical system:

> The main task of the Old Testament priests was the offering of material, animal sacrifices, all of which pointed to Christ's great sacrifice to come. These are no longer needed since Christ offered His all-sufficient sacrifice once for all. Now there remain for God's holy priesthood only the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. [184]

Lenski's observation of the contrast between "spiritual sacrifices" and animal sacrifices seems to have validity, especially considering the emphasis given in Hebrews to the eternal, transitory nature of such offerings. However, he overstated the case when he said that the only sacrifices left for the priesthood of believers are "the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving." As will be seen later in this study, the sacrifices of the believer are not limited to praise and thanksgiving; and furthermore, some of the believer's sacrifices are material in substance. Bigg takes note of the contrast with the sacrifices of the Law, but warns against too narrow an understanding of "spiritual":

> The epithet πνευματικάς (*pneumatikas*) distinguishes them from the offerings of the Law; they are not shadows and symbols, but realities, such as spirit offers to spirit, and a holy priesthood to a holy God. It would, however, be pressing the word too far to regard it as excluding all connexion with material objects; for a gift of money is spoken of as a θυσία (*thusia*) (Phil. 4:18; cf. Acts 10:4; Heb. 13:16)[185]

The normal meaning of the word "spiritual" πνευμάτικος (*pneumatikos*) is, "caused by or filled with the (divine) Spirit, pertaining or corresponding to the (divine) Spirit."[186] Since believers have their priestly office by virtue of the work of Christ, they are a people indwelt by the

184 R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 90.

185 Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, *The International Critical Commentary* (1901; rpt. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), p. 129.

186 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 685.

Spirit of God. This Spirit of God, who indwells every believer (Rom. 8:9), is to be controlling and directing in all the thoughts and activities of the believer's life. Paul, writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16, says that the indwelling Spirit of God reveals the things of God to the child of God. Paul uses the word πνευματικόσ (vv. 13, 15) to mark the contrast between the man who has the Holy Spirit of God and the one who does not.

Paul also uses πνευμάτικος in 1 Corinthians 12:1 and 14:1 to refer to spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are special abilities produced by the Spirit in the life of the Christian to enable him to function as an effective part of the body of Christ. Again, this presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit is what marks the gifts as "spiritual."

When Peter spoke of offering "spiritual sacrifices" in 1 Peter 2:5, he was speaking primarily of those sacrifices of the believer which are a result of the work of the Spirit of God in his life. The Spirit of God is to be the one controlling the believer in all that he does (Eph. 5:18), and those activities which are a result of the Spirit's work in the believer are viewed as sacrifices. The issue, therefore, is not primarily material versus immaterial, but Spirit-motivated versus self-motivated.

It should also be noted that even in the Old Testament the physical sacrifices were acceptable only when they were offered with a right heart attitude. Isaiah 1 speaks vividly to this point. David observed in Psalm 51:16-17:

> For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Peter wrote that these "spiritual sacrifices" are "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). This spiritual principle is true because the believer's priesthood is based upon, and inseparable from, the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. The word "acceptable" εὐπροσδέκτους (*euprosdektous*) means "acceptable, pleasant, welcome."[187] Wuest elaborates somewhat, commenting:

The word "acceptable" in the Greek text means literally "to receive

187 Ibid., p. 324.

> to one's self with pleasure." What a blessing it is to think that God is pleased with the spirituality He finds in the life of a Christian. He was pleased with the sacrifices offered up in Old Testament times in that they spoke of the Lord Jesus. He is pleased with the spiritual sacrifices of the believer because He sees in them a reflection of the Lord Jesus.[188]

The sacrifices of the believer have, therefore, been seen to be "spiritual" in character. This means that they are a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. These sacrifices are acceptable to God because they are offered through Jesus Christ. He is the One who has made us, and then our sacrifices, welcome to His Father.

Their Scope

The preceding section implies that the priestly ministry of the believer is all-encompassing in its scope. Since the sacrifices of the believer are spiritual, that is, produced by the Spirit of God, and the entire life of the believer is to be lived under the control of the Holy Spirit, it logically follows that everything that the believer does as a Spirit-controlled Christian can be viewed as a sacrifice to God. This is clearly stated in Romans 12:1 where Paul gives the exhortation:

> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

When Paul talks of presenting "your bodies" as a sacrifice, the idea seems to indicate everything that this body does. There seems to be no reason to limit body here to just the physical, especially considering verse 2 which shows the importance of the mind in this process. Hodge saw "bodies" as almost equivalent to "yourselves":

> The expression *your bodies* is perhaps nearly equivalent to *yourselves*; yet Paul probably used it with design, not only because it was appropriate to the figure, but because he wished to render the idea prominent, that the whole man, body as well as soul, was to be

188 Kenneth W. Wuest, *First Peter in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1942), pp. 53-54.

devoted to the service of God.[189]

Denney does not see "your bodies" as the same as "yourselves" but does not see any particular emphasis on the physical as opposed to the spiritual:

> τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν (*ta somata humon*) is not exactly the same as ὑμας αὐτοὺς (*humas autous*), yet no stress is to be laid on the words as though Paul were requiring the sanctification of the body as opposed to the spirit: the body is in view here as the instrument by which all human service is rendered to God.[190]

When Paul exhorts believers to "present" παραστῆσαι (*parastesai*)[191] their bodies to the Lord, he uses a word that he used earlier in the epistle with a similar emphasis. In Romans 6:13, 16, 19, Paul used this word in talking about turning our bodies and their various parts over to sin or over to God. The word basically means "place beside, put at someone's disposal."[192] It can also be used in reference to sacrifices and thus mean "offer, bring, present." [193] Cranfield believes the second meaning is to be preferred in Romans 12:1.

> It is much more likely that παριστάναι (*paristanai*) is here used as a technical term of religious ritual with the meaning 'to offer,' i.e. 'to offer as a sacrifice': in this case the omission of τῶ θεω (*to theo*) is understandable, for it is necessarily implied. Though παριστάναι seems never to be used elsewhere in the Greek Bible of offering a sacrifice, it appears as a technical term for offering sacrifice in extra-biblical Greek.[194]

The meaning of Paul's statement in Romans 12:1 is not affected by either emphasis attributed to the word "present," but the context is that

189 Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1886; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 383.

190 James Denney, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. II, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (n.d.; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 687.

191 παραστησαι is the aorist active infinitive of παρίστημι.

192 Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 633.

193 Ibid.

194 C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. II, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Limited, 1979), p. 598.

of sacrifice and so Cranfield's comments seem reasonable. Also, Romans 12:1 has a strong connection with the material presented in chapter 6. Paul began Romans 12:1 by saying, "Therefore I urge you" with the word "therefore" οὖν (oun) building upon what he has said in the first eleven chapters. Chapter 6 is especially fitting as a basis for what is being said in 12:1-2. In chapter 6, Paul discussed the matter of our death and resurrection with Christ. The emphasis was placed upon the fact that we died with Him so that we might live with Him and for Him (cf. 6:4-11). Just as Christ died for sin once for all and now lives to God (6:10), Paul says, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11). The exhortation to be dead to sin and alive to God is the basis that Paul uses to urge believers to stop presenting their bodies to sin and present themselves to God so that their bodies can be used to accomplish righteousness (6:12-13).

This emphasis is very similar to Romans 12:1 where the Roman Christians are exhorted to present their bodies to God as a "living" ζῶσαν (*zosan*)[195] sacrifice. Cranfield connects "living" to the thoughts of chapter 6 when he comments:

> This sacrifice, the Christian himself freely surrendered to God, is to be 'living' in a deep theological sense—living in that 'newness of life' καινότης ζωῆς (*koinotes zoes*) (6:4), with reference to which the verb ζῆν (*zen*) has already been used a number of times in this epistle (e.g. 1:17; 6:11, 13; 8:13b.)[196]

Murray also sees this as the prime connotation of a "living" sacrifice:

> Romans 6:13 is the index to Paul's meaning here. . . . It is a body alive from the dead that the believer is to present, alive from the dead because the body of sin has been destroyed. The body is to be presented as a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:15, 19)" [197]

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195 ζῶσαν (*zosan*) is the present active participle of ζάω (*zao*).

196 Cranfield, op. cit., p. 600.

197 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), p. 111.

Some see "living" as carrying the idea of permanent or continual. Murray sees this as possible along with the connection to Romans 6.

> It is possible that the word 'living' also reflects on the permanence of this offering, that it must be a constant dedication. [198]

Hodge also believed this view had merit:

> The word living, however, may mean perpetual, lasting, never neglected; as in the phrases "living bread," (John 6:51), 'bread which never loses its power;' "living hope," (1 Peter 1:3), 'hope which never fails;' "living waters," "a living way" . . . The sacrifice then which we are to make is not a transient service, like the oblation of a victim, which was in a few moments consumed upon the altar, but it is a living or perpetual sacrifice never to be neglected or recalled. [199]

What Hodge and Murray have said on this point is undoubtedly biblical, but it does not seem to be the major emphasis in Romans 12:1. The word "living" modifies "sacrifice" (θυσίαν / *thusian*) and describes the kind of sacrifice offered rather than speaking to the duration of the act of sacrificing. The continuance or duration would be more clearly and logically emphasized in the word "present." The similarity of language with Romans 6 also strongly favors that connection. Their point is not unbiblical; it just does not seem to do justice to the present passage.

One other emphasis given to the word "living" is that it stands in contrast to the sacrifices of the Levitical system. Godet advocated this view, believing that it is an error to give a spiritual significance to living:

> The expression θυσία ζῶσα (*thusia zosa*), living victim, refers to the animal victims which were offered in the Levitical cultus by putting them to death. The sacrifice required by Paul is the opposite of these. The victim must live to become, at every moment of his existence, the active agent of the divine will. The term living has not here, therefore, a spiritual sense, but should be taken in the strict sense.[200]

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198 Ibid.

199 Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1886; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 384.

200 F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1883; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), pp. 425-426.

Vine agreed, although he does not limit the contrast to Levitical sacrifices:

> That it is to be living sets it in contrast with animal sacrifices, whether those appointed by God for the Jews, or those offered in idolatrous worship by Gentiles.[201]

This view would certainly fit the immediate context of Romans 12:1 where the matter of sacrifice might make one think of the slaying of the sacrificial victim. The fact is obvious, perhaps too obvious for Paul to have stressed. Also, since the next two characteristics of the sacrifice pertain to spiritual matters (holy, well-pleasing to God), it would be in line to think that the first one (living) would also. So, while all three positions on the word "living" are true, it seems that the first one presented (connecting "living" with the truth of Romans 6) is to be preferred.

Paul says that the body of the Christian is not only presented as a "living" sacrifice, but also as one that is "holy" (ἁγίαν / *hagian*), pure, free from stain (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 19:2).[202]

> "Holy" is *hagios*, the root meaning of which is "that which is set apart for God." The Greek word has no idea of holiness about it in the sense of purity, and freedom from evil. . . . But the Christian *hagios* (holy) accrues to itself the idea of purity and freedom from sin in that the God of the Christian is both infinitely pure and is also free from sin. Thus, the physical body of the believer, put at the disposal of God, presented to Him, is holy, both in the sense of being set apart for His use, and holy in the sense of being used for pure and righteous purposes, and thus, free from sinful practices.[203]

The emphasis in Romans 12:1 seems to be on practical holiness rather than positional holiness. Paul used the related word, which is translated sanctification (ἁγιασμόν / *hagiasmon*), in Romans 6 to speak of

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201 W.E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1948; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 177.

202 William Sandy and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, The International Critical Commentary* (1895; rpt. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), p. 352.

203 Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), p. 205.

the result of presenting the members of our bodies to God for righteous purposes (cf. 6:19, 22). Of course, the foundation for this practical holiness is positional holiness, which is a result of personal faith in Christ.

The injunction that the sacrifice be "holy" has its background in the Old Testament regulations for offerings, which required that they be without defect (cf. Lev. 22:17-25). This had its ultimate realization in Christ who was seen in Hebrews to be "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners" (7:26). The character of Christ which is produced in the believer is what God the Father desires.

The third thing Paul says about the sacrifice of the believer's body is that it is "acceptable to God." The word "acceptable" (εὐάρεστον / *euareston*) denotes that the sacrifice of the believer's body is desired by God and thus well-pleasing to Him. Hodge observed the comparison to the Old Testament sacrifices:

> The term *acceptable* is here used in the same sense as the phrase, 'for a sweet smelling savour,' (Eph. 5:2; Phil. 4:18; Lev. 1:9), i.e., grateful, well-pleasing; a sacrifice in which God delights.[204]

The importance of this sacrifice is seen when we remember that the goal of the believer, both in this life and the life to come, is to be pleasing to God. "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing (εὐάρεστοι / *euarestoi*) to Him" (2 Cor. 5:9).

Paul concluded Romans 12:1 by saying that this act of bodily sacrifice is "your spiritual service of worship." This statement is "in apposition . . . to the presenting of the body as a living sacrifice." [205] The expression "service of worship" is the translation of one Greek word, λατρείαν (*latreian*).

Barclay offered some interesting observations on the development and significance of this word:

> It is *latreia*, the noun of the verb *latrevein*, meant to work for hire or pay. It was the word used of the laboring man who gave his strength to an employer in return for the pay the employer would give him. It denotes, not slavery, but the voluntary undertaking of work. It then

204 Hodge, op. cit., p. 384.

205 Denney, op. cit., p. 687.

> came to mean quite generally *to serve*; but it also came to mean *that to which a man gives his whole life*. For instance, a man could be said *latrevein kallei*, which means *to give his life to the service of beauty*. In that sense, it came very near meaning *to dedicate one's life to*. Finally, it came to be the word distinctively used of *the service of the gods*. In the Bible it never means human service; it is always used of service to and worship of God.[206]

This word is used in Hebrews 9:6 of the ministry of the priests under the Levitical system (cf. 9:1; Rom. 9:4), and so is fitting here for the priestly service of believers. Note that worship of God in Romans 12:1 is said to consist of the believer presenting his body to the Lord. True worship is not a matter of going through certain prescribed activities (singing hymns, listening to a sermon) at a specific place (church building). Believers today can easily lose sight of the substance of true worship, which is offering the sacrifices desired by God. When this is done, true worship occurs. Believers must be careful about equating certain ritualistic activity with worship.

Romans 12:1 says that this worship is "spiritual" (λογικὴν /*logikeen*). This word is only used here and in 1 Peter 2:11 and can mean either "spiritual" or "rational."[207] The fact that the word has such limited use in the New Testament coupled with the possibility of more than one meaning has caused some difficulty in discerning the exact emphasis Paul had in mind. Barrett takes note of the difficulty and offers a possible solution:

> It is hardly possible to find a satisfactory rendering of the words here translated "spiritual worship" (λογικὴ λατρεία / *logike latreia*); compare 1 Pet. 2:2, 5. Etymologically, the adjective means, "pertaining to the logos, or reason," and was therefore naturally applied, especially by the Stoics, to that which related man to God. . . . Paul means, a worship consisting not in outward rites but in the movement of man's inward being. This is better described as "spiritual worship" than as "rational," for Paul is not thinking of what is meant

206 William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 156-157.

207 Cf. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 477.

in modern English by "rational."[208]

Wuest agrees saying that it is "nearly equivalent to spiritual."[209] This emphasis fits well with what Peter says about offering up "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet. 2:5). However, Peter does use a different word for spiritual (πνευματικὰς /pneumatikas) than Paul does in Romans 12:1. This causes Godet to raise the question: "But why would not Paul have rather used in our passage the ordinary term πνευματικήν (*pneumatiken*), spiritual?"[210] He concludes that the emphasis as Paul uses it should be "reasonable" rather than "spiritual."[211]

The context of Romans 12:1-2 would seem to indicate that Paul used λογικὴν here because his emphasis was on "rational" rather than "spiritual." The fact that Paul is urging the sacrifice of the body indicates that something is in view here other than a contrast between physical and non-physical activity. Also, verse 2 focuses attention on the mind as important in accomplishing the sacrifices of the body. The believer is to be growing in "the renewing of your mind (νοός / *noos*), that you may prove (δοκιμάζειν / *dokimazein*) what the will of God is." Murray sees "rational" as the intended emphasis here:

> The service here in view is worshipful service and the apostle characterizes it as "rational" because it is worship that derives its character as acceptable to God from the fact that it enlists our mind, our reason, our intellect. It is rational in contrast with what is mechanical and automatic. A great many of our bodily functions do not enlist volition on our part. But the worshipful service here enjoined must constrain intelligent volition. The lesson to be derived from the term "rational" is that we are not "spiritual" in the biblical sense except as the use of our bodies is characterized by conscious, intelligent, consecrated devotion to the service of God.[212]

Cranfield presents a thorough and helpful discussion of the word

208 C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 231.

209 Wuest, op. cit., p. 206.

210 Godet, op. cit., p. 426.

211 Ibid.

212 Murray, op. cit., p. 112.

(λογικός / *logikos*) [213] and then observes: "But it is no simple matter to decide what is the correct conclusion to be drawn with regard to Paul's meaning."[214] He concludes, however, in agreement with Murray, that "rational" must be the correct translation in Romans 12:1.

In the second verse of Romans 12, Paul elaborates on what is involved in the believer presenting his body as a living sacrifice to God. As is often the case, Paul first presents the negative and then the positive side of his argument. He writes: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Some discussion has revolved around the difference in meaning of "conformed" (συσχηματίζεσθε / *suschematizesthe*)[215] and "transformed" (μεταμορφοῦσθε / *metamorphousthe*).[216]

> The gerund noun (*schema*) on which the verb rendered "conform" is based indicates a *form* external rather than internal, transient or unreal rather than solid and lasting. . . .
>
> The root-noun (*morphe*) is different from the root-noun of "conformed," and forms an antithesis to it. In such antithetical connections it indicates an essential, permanent, and real form. [217]

In support of this distinction in meaning, Sanday and Headlam offer the following translation of Romans 12:2: "Do not adopt the external fleeting fashion of the world, but be ye transformed in your inmost nature."[218]

Some commentators reject this difference and see the words as basically synonymous:

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213 Cranfield, op. cit., pp. 602-604.

214 Ibid., p. 604.

215 συσχηματίζεσθε (*suschematizesthe*) is the present passive imperative of συσχηματίζω (*suschematizo*).

216 μεταμορφοῦσθε (*metamorphousthe*) is the present passive imperative of μεταμορφόω (*metamorphoo*).

217 H.C.G. Moule, *Studies in Romans* (1892; rpt. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), pp. 205, 206. Trench also holds this view and is cited by Moule. Cf. Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (1880; rpt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 261-267.

218 Sunday and Headlam, op. cit., p. 353.

> An attempt is sometimes made to distinguish between 'conformed' (συσχηματίζεσθαι) and 'transformed' (μεταμορφοῦσθαι / *metamorphousthai*). The former is said to refer to outward form only, the latter to inward being. The attempt is probably baseless: (a) conformity to this age is no superficial matter; (b) Pauline usage does not support a difference between the two verbs (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18 with Phil. 3:21). [219]

Obviously, deciding on the meaning of these words as they relate to one another is not an easy matter. However, even without pursuing this matter further, the point Paul made is clear. Believers are to stop allowing themselves to be conformed to this age. The word "world" (αἰῶνι / *aioni*) was used by Paul in Galatians 1:4 when he said that Christ:

> gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul wrote that Satan is "the god of this world." Peter wrote, "Do not be conformed (συσχηματιζόμενοι / *suschematizomenoi*) to the former lusts" (1 Pet. 1:14). The believer is not to allow himself to be molded or fashioned according to the world. This again reflects Romans 6 where Paul wrote "Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness" (v. 13). The sinful activity that characterizes the world is not to characterize the Christian.

In contrast, the positive side is that the believer is to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). The change to be accomplished in the believer is affected by a renewal of the mind. Concerning this renewal, Denney wrote:

> νοῦς (nous) in the Apostle's usage (see Rom. 7) is both intellectual and moral—the practical reason, or moral consciousness. This is corrupted and atrophied in the natural man and is renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit. The process would in modern language be described rather as sanctification than regeneration, but regeneration

219 Barrett, op. cit., pp. 232-233. Cranfield has an extensive consideration of these two words and also concludes there is no distinction to be made. Cranfield, op. cit., pp. 605-608.

is assumed (Tit. 3:5).[220]

Lenski writes along the same lines but shows the connection to what has preceded in the letter to the Romans:

> In 6:4 we have "newness of life," the condition; here we have "the renewing," the process. The καινός (*kainos*) occurring in both terms is "new" as the opposite of "old" in our old man. And νοῦς (*nous*) is "mind" as "the organ of moral thinking and knowing" . . . and thus matches λογικός (*logicos*) used in v. 1. . . The Christian minds the things of the spirit, a thing he never did before, and ceases minding the things of the flesh, a thing he always did before (8:5, 6); as a son of God he is led by the Spirit of God in his very mind (8:14). His use of the body shows it.[221]

Paul wrote of this transformation accomplished in the Christian in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where he wrote that as a result of beholding the glory of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, we "are being transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα / *metamorphoumetha*) into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." In Romans 12:2 Paul said this transformation was accomplished by the renewing of the mind; in 2 Corinthians 3:18 it is said to be by the Spirit. Putting the two together, the change in the believer is clearly a result of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God in the mind of the believer to change him into the likeness of Christ.

Some time has been spent considering the details of Romans 12:1-2 because of its significance in showing the scope of the believer's sacrifice as a priest. These verses show clearly that the believer is to offer his body, including everything he does with that body, to God as a sacrifice. The believer accomplishes this by not allowing himself to be conformed to the fashion of the world and by the Spirit making him new in the realm of his mind so that he might submit himself to God and be conformed to the glorious character of Christ.

With this as a background, attention can now be given to some of the specific areas mentioned in the New Testament as sacrifices of the believer as a priest of God.

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220 Denney, op. cit., p. 688.

221 Lenski, op. cit., p. 751.

Their Identity

Not only does the New Testament say that the believer's body and all he does with it are a sacrifice, but it also singles out certain actions or activities for special attention as sacrifices which the believer offers to God. These specific sacrifices are important in revealing the life and activity of the believer as involving continual worship of God. It is to these sacrifices that careful attention must now be given.

Praise to God (Heb. 13:15). Hebrews 13:15-16 mentions three sacrifices which the believer is to offer, the first of which is "a sacrifice of praise to God" (v. 15). The context connects this service of sacrifice to the high priestly ministry of Christ. The writer of Hebrews has just referred to the sacrifice of Christ in verse 12 where he wrote:

> Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

The stress in verse 15 is that the sacrifices of the believer must be offered through Christ. Kent remarks:

> "Through him" occupies the emphatic position in this statement, stressing that it is through Christ alone, not through any Levitical mediation, that worshippers truly come to God."[222]

The "sacrifice of praise" (θυσίαν αἰνέσεως / *thusian aineseos*) has a background in the Old Testament as Delitzsch observed:

> θυσίαν αἰνέσεως is, in the Old Testament sacrificial ritual, the name given to the voluntary peace-offering . . . (Lev. 7:12–25), which is offered in consequence of any event imposing the duty of special thanks and praise, and is distinguished from other peace-offerings by an addition of cakes, in conformity with its joyful occasion and aim, and also by a shorter interval of time being allowed for the eating of it, in conformity with its greater sanctity.[223]

What the author of Hebrews means by a "sacrifice of praise" is further explained as "the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name"

222 Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 286.

223 Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, II (1871; rpt. Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 392.

(Heb. 13:15). The word translated "give thanks" is ὁμολογούντων (*homologounton*)[224] which means, "lit., to speak the same thing (homos, same, lego, to speak), to assent, accord, agree with."[225] Furst sees a special meaning for this word in Hebrews 13:15:

> *Homologeo* in Heb. 13:15 and *exhomologeo* in Matt. 11:25; Lk. 10:21; and Rom. 15:9 . . . have the LXX [Septuagint] meaning of praise. . . . Heb. 13:15 calls on the church to praise the name of God through Christ.[226]

He goes on to acknowledge that, "the word-group, however, is used most frequently in the sense of confess, confess openly, state publicly." [227]

While the meaning of praise fits ὁμολογέω (*homologeo*) in Hebrews 13:15, it would seem to be better to stay with the normal meaning of the word. To give the word a different meaning in this one passage is rather arbitrary when the normal meaning makes sense. The idea rather is that this sacrifice involves speaking "openly" or "publicly" in agreement with His name. In other words, the speaking and saying those things are what is consistent with and a reflection of the character of God. This would include praising and thanking Him but would include many other things as well. A couple of other passages in the New Testament support this interpretation.

Peter had the same emphasis in mind when he wrote that believers are, among other things, a royal priesthood so that they "may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Believers are to be making known what Christ has done for them. The word translated "proclaim" is ἐξαγγείλητε (*exangeilete*)[228] and

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224 ὁμολογούντων (*homologounton*) is the present active participle of ὁμολογέω (*homologeo*).

225 W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1940; rpt. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), p. 224.

226 D. Furst, "Confess," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. I, gen ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 346.

227 Ibid.

228 ἐξαγγείλητε (*exangeilete*) is the aorist active subjunctive of ἐξαγγέλλω.

means "tell out, proclaim, make known."[229] On the significance of this word, Johnstone wrote:

> The thought of "telling forth," so as to make known far and wide, is evidently made prominent by the preposition of the compound.[230]

"Excellencies" is a fine translation of the word ἀρετάς (*aretas*), concerning which Bigg comments:

> Here it is used in its proper Greek sense of any shining or eminent quality, such as makes a man noble in himself and glorious in the eyes of others. . . . Here the sense is very nearly that of μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ (*megaleia tou theou*) (Acts 2:11). The Christian is to show forth in word and life, not merely the goodness of God, but His glory, His greatness, all His noble attributes, wisdom, justice, strength.[231]

Peter, therefore, is saying that it was God's purpose that believers, as a priesthood, should be proclaiming or making known the glorious character of God. This is the same as "lips that give thanks (confess) to His name" in Hebrews 13:15.

A similar idea may be in view in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 where believers are said to give off a "sweet aroma," which is identified as "the knowledge of Him" (2 Cor. 2:14). Paul continued to say believers are a "fragrance to God (cf. Gen. 8:20-21). When the believer is making Christ known by correctly presenting Him as revealed in the Scriptures (cf. 2 Cor. 2:17), he is said to be offering a sacrifice which is pleasing to God.

The expression "the fruit of lips" in Hebrews 13:15 is based on the LXX (Septuagint) of Hosea 14:2. The Hebrew text reads "calves of our lips," giving it a clear sacrificial emphasis. On the difference in translation, Kent observed:

> Whatever may have caused the Septuagint to translate as "fruit," the point of the passage is clear. God is primarily interested not in

229 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 580.

230 Johnstone, op. cit., p. 136.

231 Bigg, op. cit., pp. 134-135.

> calves slain upon material altars, but in "calves of our lips"; that is, the spiritual sacrifice of lips devoted to the acknowledgment of God and the praise of Him.[232]

The author of Hebrews says that the sacrifice is to be offered "continually" (παντός / pantos). Paul said the same thing in 2 Corinthians 2:14 when he wrote that God "manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." The fact that we speak of Christ "in every place" (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ / *en panti topo*) would indicate that we speak of Him "continually." The conversation of the believer ought to always be consistent with the character of God and a declaration of that glorious character.

Jesus said that "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt. 12:34; cf. Lk. 6:45). The "heart" here is basically synonymous with the mind. Romans 12:2 spoke of the "renewing of your mind," and this renewed mind (or heart) is to control the speech of the believer. The believer's heart is to be filled with appreciation for the person and work of Jesus Christ. This new heart causes the believer's mouth to make known the glories of the one who called him out of darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9).

The reality of this sacrifice of the believer places great importance on the words of a believer. He must recognize that his conversation is to be offered as a sacrifice to God. This leaves no room for idle or worthless talk, let alone profane and unholy speech. Being aware that he is a priest offering a sacrifice to God ought to cause every believer to speak of His character and be consistent with His character, so that this sacrifice might be acceptable to God.

Doing Good (Heb. 13:16). The next sacrifice mentioned by the author of Hebrews shows that the believer must go beyond saying the right things. The speech of the believer must also be supported by his actions, which are viewed as a sacrifice to God. This sacrifice is identified as "doing good" and is broad in its emphasis as Walvoord noted:

> This comprehends all the service rendered to God in the path of

232 Kent, op. cit., p. 287.

> his divine will. The whole Christian life in a sense is a sacrifice of good works. . . . Such a point of view contemplates the Christian life as one fundamentally fulfilling the will of God rather than self-satisfaction and adds dignity to even the humble tasks which may not seem to resemble a priestly ministry.[233]

Paul talks about the ministry of the believer in his letter to the Galatians, although he does not connect it to their priesthood on that occasion:

> So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10).

Paul makes it clear that while the believer is to do good to all, he has special responsibility to other believers. As children of God and members of the same family, believers naturally have special responsibilities to others in the family (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews says that one of the responsibilities that believers have to one another is to "consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). On the word "consider," Wuest wrote:

> "Consider" is the translation of *katanoeo* which speaks of attentive, continuous care. The exhortation is to take careful note of each other's spiritual welfare.[234]

Believers have a responsibility to stimulate other believers to carry out the priestly sacrifice of good works. Often Christians are content to point out the failure of others in this key area rather than considering how they might provoke them to good works.

Jesus noted the importance of good works when He said: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The good works of the believer are a testimony to others of God's work in his life and will result in men glorifying God.

That this sacrifice of the believer encompasses all that he does is

233 Walvoord, *Jesus Christ our Lord*, op. cit., p. 249.

234 Kenneth S. Wuest, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 182.

brought out clearly by Paul in Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." While this verse does not mention the priesthood of the believer, the implications are the same as Hebrews 13:16: the believer is serving the Lord in all that he does and so must act accordingly. The awareness of the importance of this sacrifice should keep the believer from considering any activity mundane or unimportant. This is a danger especially in the everyday routine tasks that confront us. And yet to recognize that this task is being done as a priestly sacrifice to God lifts it out of the temporal realm into the eternal with great significance and importance. For the believer, he performs no unimportant or insignificant tasks.

Sharing (Heb. 13:16). A third sacrifice mentioned in Hebrews 13:16 is that of sharing, which is closely linked to "doing good" and is viewed by some as part of that sacrifice. However, they seem to be distinct enough to be considered as separate sacrifices even though there are areas where they merge. The word translated "sharing" is κοινωνίας (*koinonias*), which means "association, communion, fellowship, participation."[235]

Hauck comments that it "denotes 'participation,' 'fellowship,' esp. with a close bond. It expresses a two-sided relation."[236] Many commentators see the idea in Hebrews 13:16 being that of sharing material goods. Kent sees this as a possibility: "In this instance some sort of practical sharing of goods seems warranted."[237] However, Kent goes on to add:

> It may be unduly restrictive, however, to limit koinonia to the sharing of material goods. There are many ways in which Christians fellowship with one another. Sharing of experiences, encouraging one another in suffering or discouragement or temptation—all of these and countless other situations are opportunities for the Christian virtue of "sharing" to be exercised.[238]

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235 J. Schattenmann, "κοινωνία," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, op. cit., p. 639.

236 Friedrich Hauck, "κοινωνίας" (*koinonias*) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 798.

237 Kent, op. cit., p. 287.

238 Ibid., p. 288.

The concept of "sharing" in Hebrews 13:16 would seem to be broader than just the sharing of material goods, although this could certainly be included. The author to the Hebrews expressed the need for fellowship among believers when he wrote that we are not to be "forsaking our own assembling together" (Heb. 10:25). While the word κοινωνία (koinonia) is not used in this passage,[239] the concept of involvement in a close, intimate relationship with other believers is clearly presented. Believers being involved with other believers is seen in this passage as aiding them in functioning as God intends them to function ("stimulate . . . to love and good deeds" v. 24; "encouraging one another" v. 25).

Later in Hebrews 10 the author says that those Jewish Christians had "endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers (κοινωνία / koinonia) with those who were so treated" (vv. 32-33). Here Christians are said to have suffered by being involved in a close bond with those who were being persecuted for their faith. These Christians continued in their love and support and continued to be publicly associated with the persecuted believers. They were not like those of whom Paul wrote: "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me" (2 Tim. 4:16). These Hebrew Christians had shared together in the distress of fellow believers. The importance of this involvement is stressed by Peter when he says that when believers are persecuted for their faith in Christ, they "share (κοινωνεῖτε: a verbal form of κοινωνία /*koinoneite*) the sufferings of Christ" (1 Pet. 4:13).

Another area where "sharing" among believers is to occur is in the area of material possessions. As has been noted, many commentators believe this is the emphasis in Hebrews 13:16. In other passages, this seems to be the emphasis. In Romans 15:26, Paul speaks of contributions of money he has collected for believers in Jerusalem, and then he says, "For if the Gentiles have shared (ἐκοινώνησαν / *ekoinonesan*) in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things" (Rom. 15:27). The Gentiles had been the beneficiaries of the Jews from Jerusalem sharing spiritual things with them, so they are indebted to participate with them in material needs. "If we sowed spiri-

239 "Assembling together" is the translation of ἐπισυναγωγὴν (*episunagogen*).

tual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" (1 Cor. 9:11). Obviously, the greater blessings are the spiritual ones, so to respond by sharing material things is not too much to expect.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul refers to this same collection for the saints at Jerusalem with the word κοινονία (*koinonia*). In 2 Corinthians 8:4, Paul tells the Corinthians that the Macedonians gave willingly, "begging us with much urging for the favor of participation (κοινωνίαν / *koinonian*) in the support of the saints." Interestingly, Paul goes on to explain how this happened: "They first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God" (v. 5). The involvement of the Macedonian Christians in meeting the material needs of other believers was the result of yielding themselves to the Lord and allowing Him to accomplish His will in their lives. This closely follows the pattern set down in Romans 12:1-2.

This same collection is referred to in 2 Corinthians 9:13 where Paul wrote: "Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution (κοινονίας / *koinonias*) to them and to all." Here the connection is made between sharing together with other believers in this way and being obedient to their confession (ὁμολογίας / *homologias*) of the gospel. The sacrifice of sharing is one that the believer must offer if he is going to be obedient to the gospel.

In one passage, Paul very clearly identifies the sharing of material goods as a sacrifice to God. Paul commended the Philippians with the observation that "after I left Macedonia, no church shared (ἐκοινώνησεν / *ekoinonesen*) with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone" (Phil. 4:15). He proceeded, "I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (v. 18). The Philippians' sharing of material substance with Paul is said to have really been a sacrifice offered to God. In fact, God accepted this sharing of earthly goods as pleasing to Himself.

> The finest thing that can be said about these gifts is this: they are described as a "fragrant odor, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." Higher praise even Paul could not have bestowed upon the

> givers. The gifts are "an odor of a sweet smell," "an offering presented to God, welcome and very pleasing to him." They are comparable to the thank-offering of Abel (Gen. 4:4), of Noah (Gen. 8:21), of the Israelites when in the proper frame of mind they brought whole-burnt-offerings (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17).[240]

Paul wrote that the most significant fact about the gift the Philippians gave to him was that it was a pleasing sacrifice to God. Because of this fact, they received greater benefit from giving it than Paul did in receiving it. "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (Phil. 4:17). Walvoord comments on the remarkable fact that material things are a sacrifice desired and accepted by God:

> It is remarkable that a God who possesses all earthly things can be impressed by the temporal gifts of His children. It is not the amount or character of the gift that is important. It is the love and devotion it reflects. In giving a love token to one of infinite wealth the value of the gift is insignificant. The thoughtfulness, love, and motives that prompt the gift are by far more important. The widow's mite is noticed by an infinite God who ignores the gifts without sacrifice of the rich.[241]

Christians need to recognize that giving material substance to the work of God is a sacrifice to God. This biblical truth ought to cause believers to evaluate carefully their actions in this area. It becomes a personal issue between God and the giver. Too often external considerations become the motivating factor rather than a heart response to the overwhelming grace of God manifested in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9).

In areas where the sacrifice of sharing (κοινωνία / *koinonia*) is being manifested, the believer must keep in mind the foundation for such involvements. John wrote that what he saw and heard concerning Jesus Christ "we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship (κοινωνίαν / *koinonian*) with us; and indeed our fellowship (κοινωνία

240 William Hendriksen, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), pp. 208-209.

241 John F. Walvoord, *To Live Is Christ* (Findlay: Dunham Publishing Co., 1961), p. 91.

/*koinonia*) is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1:3).

A person must hear and believe the message concerning Christ so that he comes to share in the life of God Himself. Paul wrote of this in 1 Corinthians 1:9: "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship (κοινωνίαν / *koinonian*) with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." This most intimate and complete relationship of sharing with God the Father and God the Son becomes the foundation for a relationship with other believers. This fellowship with Him is what makes fellowship with other believers possible.

Philippians 2:1 speaks of the "fellowship (κοινωνία / *koinonia*) of the Spirit"[242] which reveals that we not only have a personal relationship with the Spirit as well as with the Father and Son, but that He also produces this relationship of fellowship among believers. Again, as was seen in 1 Peter 2:5, this sacrifice of the believer is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The specific areas of fellowship among believers mentioned in the New Testament are all manifestations of an intimate, sharing relationship that believers have with one another as a result of the work of the Spirit in their lives. This relationship among believers, produced by the Spirit, is itself based upon a relationship of fellowship with God Himself as a result of faith in the finished work of our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 13:16, God has given an exhortation and warning regarding these sacrifices. A command is given in the first part of this verse when the author says, "And do not neglect doing good and sharing." The word translated "neglect" ἐπιλανθάνεσθε (*epilanthanesthe*)[243]

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242 κοινονία πνευματος (*koinonia pneumatos*). "This genitive transcends both objective and subjective; one might call it adjectival. That it is a fellowship with the Holy Spirit, an actual participation in that Spirit and in all His benefits cannot be doubted (cf. I Cor. 10:16; 1 John 1:3). But Paul also here regards it as the gift of the Spirit, just as he here considers the persuasive appeal as springing from love, and just as in 2 Cor. 13:13 he views grace as being the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, love the gift of the Father, and fellowship the gift of the Holy Spirit." Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 98, fn. 73. He also has a very helpful discussion of κοινωνία (*koinonia*). Ibid., pp. 51-54, 93-95.

243 ἐπιλανθάνεσθε (*epilanthanesthe*) is the present middle imperative of επιλανθάνοηαι (*epilanthanomai*).

means "neglect, overlook, care nothing about"[244] and is given as a command (imperative). The Christian must not be careless or indifferent about these areas. "Doing good and sharing" are not spectacular in nature nor do they have an especially "spiritual" look to them. Evangelism or Bible teaching are easily seen as spiritual activity, but the more average everyday activities can easily be taken for granted and not viewed as having any true spiritual significance. The result is believers neglect them, either consciously or without thinking. The command from God is that we are not to neglect doing good and sharing.

The reason given for the command is, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (v. 16). Since this is indeed the goal of all the Christian's labors (2 Cor. 5:9), it behooves him to give attention to what God says is important. A Christian can easily focus on that which appears to evidence spirituality and neglect the very things God says are pleasing to Him. Believers must always remember that they are priests to God and as such, their prime and sole responsibility is to offer the sacrifices He demands and that are acceptable to Him.

Converts (Rom. 15:16). Paul viewed himself as a priest ministering the Word of God so that those who heard and believed might be presented to God as a sacrifice. In Romans 15:16 he wrote that the Gentiles saved under his preaching were a sacrifice he offered to God. Paul uses several words connected with the priestly ministry in describing his work with the Gentiles. He calls himself "a minister λειτουργόν (*leitourgon*) of Christ Jesus."

> "Minister" here is not the usual word translated "minister," namely diakonos (a servant), but leitourgos, used in secular life of a public minister, a servant of the state, in sacred things, of the priests of the Jerusalem Temple (Heb. 8:2). Paul used it here to speak of his ministry of preaching the gospel as a priestly ministry, and of equal value and sacredness to the priesthood of the Old Testament.[245]

When Paul wrote that he was "ministering as a priest" he used the

244 Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 295.

245 Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament*, op. cit., p. 249.

word ἱερουργοῦντα (*hierourgounta*)[246] which means "perform holy service, act as a priest."[247] Paul sees the proclamation of the gospel of God as a priestly function that he exercises. This perspective is consistent with the emphasis of several other passages connected with the priestly service, such as Hebrews 13:16, 1 Peter 2:9, and 2 Corinthians 1:14-17.[248]

Paul carries on this priestly ministry of presenting the gospel for the purpose of offering a sacrifice that is pleasing to God. He expresses this purpose saying, "that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Cranfield comments that this

> Indicates the purpose behind God's giving His gracious commission to Paul to be Christ's λειτουργός (*leitourgos*) with regard to the Gentiles by his service of the gospel—it was that the sacrifice consisting of the Gentiles might be acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.[249]

The Gentiles who believed the gospel that Paul proclaimed were viewed by him as an offering he presented to God. He expresses the desire that this offering "may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

> An offering to be acceptable to God must conform to conditions of purity. So in this case. The conditions of holiness are created by the Holy Spirit. Hence the clause, "sanctified by the Holy Spirit," stands in apposition to "acceptable." The apostle thinks of his function in the priestly action as ministering the gospel which is efficacious through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Gentiles became an offering acceptable to God.[250]

Paul, as a priest of God, presented the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4), which was used by the Spirit of God to bring Gentiles into a personal relation-

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246 ἱερουργοῦντα (hierourgounta) is the present active participle of ἱερουργέω (hierourgeo).

247 Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 374.

248 Cf. pp. 96–98 of this book.

249 Cranfield, op. cit., p. 756.

250 Murray, op. cit., p. 211.

ship with Christ so that they, as those who have been sanctified, can be an offering acceptable to God. Interestingly, all three persons of the Godhead are involved in this offering.

This sacrifice shows the importance of the presentation of the gospel by the believer in preparing a sacrifice acceptable to God. Part of the believer's responsibility as a priest is to be "ministering as a priest the gospel of God." The presenting of the gospel is for the purpose of having an acceptable offering prepared by the Spirit of God. Again, the emphasis is clear that the sacrifices of the believer are "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet. 2:5), that is, sacrifices which are a result of the Spirit's work. But the believer must be ministering the gospel so that the Spirit has opportunity to use it in the preparation of an acceptable offering (Rom. 10:14-15, 17; 1 Pet. 1:22-23; James 1:18). In this way, we, as priests of God, can present to Him, as an offering that is acceptable to Him, those who have come to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Death (2 Tim. 4:6). In writing his last letter, Paul referred to his impending death as a sacrifice: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (2 Tim: 4:6). Paul was a prisoner in Rome at the time of this writing, and he knew that he would soon be martyred for his testimony for Jesus Christ. Hendriksen offers a very helpful exposition of Paul's statement:

> When Paul writes, "For I am already being poured out as a drink-offering," he is making a profession of faith. He does not call his present horrible imprisonment, with the issue no longer in doubt, *death*, but a *drink-offering*, comparable to the libation of wine which was poured out beside the altar. According to the law (Num. 15:1-10), when a lamb was sacrificed, the drink-offering consisting of one-fourth of a hin of wine (1 hin = slightly more than 1 gallon); when the offering was a ram, the prescribed libation was one-third of a hin; and for a bull it was one-half of a hin. Since this wine was gradually poured out, was an offering, and was the final act of the entire sacrificial ceremony, it pictured most adequately the gradual ebbing away of Paul's life, the fact that he was presenting this life to God as an offering, and the idea that while he viewed his entire career of faith as "a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1; cf. 15:16), he looked upon the

present stage of his career as being the final sacrificial act.[251]

Paul had used this same analogy in a letter written to the Philippians during an earlier imprisonment: "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all" (Phil. 2:17).[252] Actually, two sacrifices are mentioned in this verse: (1) Paul's being poured out as a drink offering; (2) the "sacrifice . . . of your faith." The manifestation of the faith of the Philippians in their service to God is viewed as the main sacrifice here (good works) over which Paul is poured as the drink offering. "What humility for the great apostle to rejoice that someday he would be the lesser part of the sacrifice poured out upon the major part, the Philippians' Christian testimony and service to God.[253] By the grace of God, Paul was spared on this occasion for continued ministry.

Paul's attitude toward death and dying enabled him to confront it with confidence. "Paul did not view his approaching death as a failure in God's program but as a means of honoring the Lord. From John 21:19, we see that even the believer's death glorifies the Lord." [254] The death of the believer is the final act of sacrifice which he performs before being ushered into God's presence. The believer has little control over this offering. Rather, God determines the time and place of that sacrifice. To know that death is an offering to God for the believer gives this unpleasant task a glow of glory.

It should be noted that Paul connects this offering with his "departure" (ἀναλύσεως / *analuseos*) in 2 Timothy 4:6. Concerning this word, Wuest comments:

> It was a common expression for death. It was used in military circles of the taking down of a tent and the departure of an army, and in nautical language, of the hoisting of an anchor and the sailing of a

251 William Hendricksen, *1-2 Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 313.

252 Second Timothy 4:6 and Philippians 2:17 are the only uses of σπένδω (*spendo*) in the New Testament.

253 Kenneth S. Wuest, *Philippians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1942), p. 78.

254 Harold J. Berry, *Gems from the Original*, Vol. II (Lincoln: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975), p. 119.

> ship. Paul uses the same word in Philippians 1:23. . . . In his first use of the word it would seem that he used the figure of striking one's tent. He was in a military camp, and he was a tent-maker by trade, and he spoke of the human body as a tent.
>
> If so, it is probable that he had the same figure of speech in mind here.[255]

Paul used a similar metaphor in 2 Corinthians 5 in referring to the death of the believer. So, his coming death was the time when his body would be presented as an offering to the Lord, and he would move out of his body into the presence of the Lord in glory (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8).

This subject of the sacrifices of the believer is aptly summarized by Bruce:

> Christianity is sacrificial through and through; it is founded on the one self-offering of Christ, and the offering of His people's praise and property, of their service and their lives, is caught up into the perfection of His acceptable sacrifice, and is accepted in Him.[256]

The Intercession of the Believer's Priesthood

Another area which is closely connected to the priesthood of the believer is that of intercession. Walvoord notes that "The work of the believer-priest, like the work of Christ, is divided into two areas: the believer's sacrifices and the believer's intercession."[257] The attitudes toward the believer's priestly ministry of intercession vary from making it the only priestly function of the believer to rejecting it as a priestly ministry.

Kalland argues that intercession is the only priestly ministry carried on by believers today:

> This priesthood is severely limited in action to intercession, because all being priests no representative functions remain except on the

255 Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 160-161.

256 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 406.

257 Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, op. cit., p. 248.

> part of Christ in His redemptive acts and continuing mediatorial ministry.[258]

Kalland makes no mention of the believer's sacrifices, so it is not possible to know how he would explain them or why he does not consider them a ministry of the believer's priesthood. His position seems to be more of a reaction to the Roman Catholic abuse of the concept of priesthood than an explanation of the biblical teaching on the subject.

Estes is uncomfortable with the emphasis on intercession and offers what he believes is a more correct perspective:

> Though the intercessory supplication of believers in behalf of other persons has of late often been represented as a priestly act, as being, indeed, that activity which is essential to any real priesthood of believers, the NT thought is quite different, and is to be thus conceived: In ancient times it was held that men in general could not have direct access to God, that any approach to Him must be mediated by some member of the class of priests, who alone could approach God, and represent them before Him. This whole conception vanishes in the light of Christianity. By virtue of their relation to Christ all believers have direct approach to God, and consequently, as this right of approach was formerly a priestly privilege, priesthood may now be predicated of every Christian.[259]

The last statement of Estes is sound and correct. However, he also seems to be writing in reaction to unbiblical conceptions of the believer's priesthood rather than attempting to present the positive biblical teaching on the subject. He attempts to disassociate the priesthood of the believer from the priestly activities performed by the believer.

> It may well be noted first that the conception of the priesthood of believers, standing by itself is in no way related to the various priestly activities which are also figuratively attributed to them.[260]

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258 Earl S. Kalland, "Priest, Priesthood," *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, John Rea, II (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 1398.

259 David Foster Estes, "Priesthood in the NT," The *International Standard Bible Encvclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr, IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), p. 2446.

260 Ibid.

To say that the priesthood of the believer and the various priestly activities attributed to the believer have no connection seems very strange and arbitrary. This is certainly not the conclusion one would draw from a study of the Scriptures.

It seems simple and consistent with the testimony of Scripture to recognize that believers as priests before God are required to carry on the priestly ministries of sacrifice and intercession. The ministry of intercession involves the believer's service of prayer, as Walvoord notes: "This aspect of his priestly work involves all his work in prayer, regardless of its particular character."[261] Chafer comments on this ministry and its foundation in the high priestly work of Christ:

> As for this dispensation, in addition to the fact that Christ as High Priest has with His own blood now entered into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:14-16; 9:24; 10:19-22) and is now interceding for His own who are in the world (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), when Christ died, the veil of the temple was rent—which signifies that the way into the holiest is now open, not to the world, but to all who come unto God on the ground of the shed blood of Christ (Heb. 10:19-22). Having unhindered access to God on the ground of the blood of Christ, the New Testament priest is thus privileged to minister in intercession (Rom. 8:26-27; Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Tim. 2:1; Col. 4:12).[262]

The ministry of intercession is carried on by the believer both for himself and for others. Hebrews 4:16 exhorts the believer to come with confidence into the presence of God to receive "help in time of need." Thus, the Christian does not need to seek someone else to intercede in God's presence for him. Rather, he is exhorted to come himself, based on the high priestly work of Christ and receive from the "throne of grace" what he needs and desires.

The same idea is expressed in Philippians 4:6-7 when the believer is exhorted to, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (v. 6). The result promised is, "And the peace of God, which

261 Walvoord, op. cit., p. 250.

262 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 67.

surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). As the believer brings his requests into the presence of God in prayer, his anxieties are replaced with God's peace.

The believer also has the privilege of carrying on a ministry of intercession for others. This is seen in the Apostle Paul's ministry, both as he prays for others and as he requested them to pray for him. In Romans 15:30, Paul urged the Romans "to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (cf. also 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:18; etc.). Paul also constantly prayed for other believers on a regular basis (cf. Eph. 1:15-18; Col. 1:9-12; etc.).

The ministry of intercession (prayer) is one of the great privileges and responsibilities given to the believer in his role as a priest to God. This, of course, is all based upon the high priestly work of Christ. One of the tragedies of the Christian life is that many believer-priests neglect the vital ministry of intercession, both for themselves and for others. This privilege of access to God opens limitless opportunities to the believer in his ministry as a priest to God.

The importance of the priesthood of the believer needs to be stressed. It marks him off as one with a special relationship to God and puts all his activities into the realm of service to God. The importance of the priesthood of the believer, and of the sacrifices and intercession connected with this priesthood, is summarized by Walvoord:

> In offering his sacrifices and intercession, the believer-priest is fulfilling in large measure his total effective ministry for God in this world. The fulfillment of his priestly responsibilities is integral in any vital Christian experience and effective witness for God.[263]

263 Walvoord, op. cit., p. 250.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

This consideration of the Melchizedekian Priesthood of Christ as developed in the Scriptures has involved an evaluation of the foundation for this priesthood presented in the Old Testament and a study of its development presented in the Book of Hebrews, particularly chapter 7. It concluded with a presentation of the application of this priesthood to the daily walk of the believer.

The study began with the historical account of Melchizedek presented in Genesis 14. Various possibilities concerning the identity of this historical figure were considered, including the possibilities that he was Shem or the preincarnate Christ. Both were rejected in favor of recognizing him to be a type of Christ. Hebrews 7 was helpful in establishing this conclusion. The uniqueness of the twofold office of Melchizedek as priest and king was also evaluated. He was seen to be king of the ancient city of Jerusalem as well as a true priest of the living God. He was, therefore, a man who represented a line of descendants from the days of Noah who had remained true to God.

The only other reference to Melchizedek in the Old Testament, Psalm 110:4, was seen to be a prophetic reference to Christ. This Psalm presents the coming Messiah to be both king and priest, although the emphasis is on His priesthood. Zechariah 6 provided a parallel reference to the prophetic one in Psalm 110, although it contains no mention of Melchizedek by name.

The Melchizedekian priesthood as realized in Christ superseded and replaced the Levitical system. Christ met the five qualifications for priesthood as set down in Hebrews 5. The superiority of His priesthood was examined. The study of Hebrews 7 revealed Melchizedek and his priesthood to be superior to Abraham, Levi, and the entire Levitical system.

The Melchizedekian Priesthood of Christ applies to the believer's life and conduct. This believer's priesthood is revealed in several passages of the New Testament and is based on the high priestly work of Christ. The sacrifices that the believer offers as a priest to God are spiritual sacrifices that encompass all that the believer does. Specific sacrifices considered were: praise to God, doing good, sharing, converts, death, and intercession (prayer, both for self and for others).

No subject of greater significance or importance to the child of God is revealed in Scripture than the Melchizedekian Priesthood of Jesus Christ. It involves His work of redemption in offering a sacrifice that was sufficient to take care of sins forever. This work of Christ is what enables a believer to come, with confidence, into the presence of God. All that we do as believers is based upon the work of Christ. This role of believer-priests is of utmost importance to those who have been redeemed and established as priests before God. Because of this, Believers should always function in a way that honors Him. This means functioning knowing that we are priests to God and all our activities are viewed as sacrifices to Him.

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